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ABSTRACT

This book is a selection of profiles of children's authors featured in the journal "Language Arts" over the years. The book's 12 individual profiles highlight some of the real people who contribute to children's book publishing, provide a sample of a few of the many genres of books available for children, and give an insight into the unique experience each contributor brings to children's books and the processes involved in the creation and publishing of a work of literature for children. Authors featured in the book include: novelists Walter Dean Myers, Cynthia Voigt, and E.B. White; translator Anthea Bell; editor Jean Karl; poets Arnold Adoff, Byrd Baylor, and Lilian Moore; folklorist Alvin Schwartz; and author/illustrators Mitsumasa Anno, Arnold Lobel, and Chris Van Allsburg. (PRA)

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Getting To Know You

Profiles of Children's Authors Featured in *Language Arts* 1985-90

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Selected by
Barbara Kiefer

Getting to Know You: Profiles of Children's Authors Featured in *Language Arts*, 1985–90

Selected by
Barbara Kiefer

National Council of Teachers of English
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Preface

The articles selected for this special issue were chosen from the many "Profile" features that have appeared in *Language Arts* over the years. They were chosen to highlight some of the real people who contribute to children's book publishing and to provide a sample of a few of the many genres of books available for children. Although the articles may not provide easy answers to children's oft-asked question, "Where do you get your ideas?" the articles do provide insight into the unique experience each contributor brings to children's books and the processes involved in the creation and publishing of a work of literature for children. Teachers who want to discuss these processes with children, who want to discover more about the backgrounds of authors and illustrators of books for children, and who want to deepen their understanding of the unique qualities that authors or illustrators may bring to their works will want to peruse other issues of *Language Arts* for additional "Profiles." Other sources of information are listed below.

1. Publishers of children's books. Publishers are happy to send publicity information to teachers. Address a letter requesting information to the Children's Book Marketing Division of the publisher listed on a book's copyright page.
2. Books that feature essays or biographical material about well-known children's writers and illustrators. These include:
   Celebrating Children's Books by Betsy Hearne and Marilyn Kaye (Eds.), Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1981.
   The Marble in the Water: Essays on Contemporary Writers of Fiction for Children by David Rees, The Horn Book Magazine, 1980.
   Innocence and Experience: Essays and Conversations on Children's Literature by Barbara Harrison and Gregory Maguire (Compilers), Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1987.
   More Books by More People: Interviews with Sixty-five Authors of Books for Children by Lee Bennett Hopkins, Scholastic Book Service, 1974.

Signposts to Criticism in Children's Literature by Robert Bator, American Library Association, 1983.
Worlds of Childhood: The Art and Craft of Writing for Children by William Zinsser (Ed.), Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

3. Books of essays on writing and illustrating:
A Circle of Quiet by Madeleine L'Engle, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972.
Gates of Excellence: On Reading and Writing Books for Children by Katherine Paterson, E. P. Dutton, 1981.
Lotus Seeds: Children, Pictures, and Books by Marcia Brown, Charles Scribner, 1986.
The Spying Heart: More Thoughts on Reading and Writing Books for Children by Katherine Paterson, E. P. Dutton, 1989.
Talent Is Not Enough: Mollie Hunter on Writing for Children by Mollie Hunter, Harper & Row, 1976.

4. Ongoing volumes with biographical and other information about authors and illustrators:
The Junior Book of Authors, H. W. Wilson Co., Bronx, NY.
Something about the Author, Gale Book Research, Detroit, MI.

1 *Novelists*

Walter Dean Myers

Rudine Sims Bishop

Ka-phoomp! Ka-phoomp! Da Doom Da Dooom!
Ka-phoomp! Ka-phoomp! Da Doom Da Dooom!
You can call me Mouse, 'cause that's my tag
I'm into it all, everything's my bag
You know I can run you know I can hoop
I can do it alone, or in a group
My ace is Styx, he'll always do
Add Bev and Sheri, and you got my crew
My tag is Mouse, and it'll never fail
And just like a mouse I got me a tale

From *The Mouse Rap* © by Walter Dean Myers.
Reprinted with permission.

"The Mouse" is fourteen-year-old Frederick Douglas, who lives in Harlem, loves basketball ("I can hoop"), and, with his best friend Styx and the rest of his crew, becomes involved in the search for the loot from a 1930s bank heist purportedly left in an abandoned Harlem building by the gangster Tiger Moran. The girls in the crew also try to persuade the boys to dance with them in a talent contest, an idea with little appeal to the Mouse or his male friends. Beverly, the new girl from California, threatens to come between Mouse and his best friend. As if that is not enough, Mouse's father, separated from his mother, is apparently trying to win his way back into the family, and Mouse must cope with his own ambivalence. It's a busy summer and a funny tale.

The Mouse Rap (1990) is Walter Dean Myers's most recently published novel, and it is a journey back to the landscape of his first novel, *Fast*

Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (1975). Both books are set in a Harlem portrayed, not as some ghetto hell, but as an ordinary city neighborhood; both are peopled with teenaged boys and girls—good friends trying on new roles and dreaming up escapades to occupy their time. Both reveal some of Myers's major strengths as a writer—his ear for dialogue and the informal language of urban African Americans, his ability to create humor, his flair for drama, and his creation of likeable and believable characters for whom he has strong affection.

There were fifteen years and twenty-five children's and young adult books between the publication of *Fast Sam* and *The Mouse Rap*, and in that time Myers has become a well-known and highly respected writer of fiction for readers in the upper elementary grades and beyond. Several of his books have been named ALA Notables or Best Books for Young Adults; he has won three Coretta Scott King Awards—for *The Young Landlords* (1979), *Motown and Didi* (1984), and *Fallen Angels* (1988). *Scorpions* (1988) was named a Newbery Honor Book, and *Fallen Angels*, his Vietnam War novel published the same year, received widespread critical acclaim.

Another measure of his stature is that Twayne Publishing Company selected him as the subject of one of the biocritical books in its Young Adult Authors Series (Bishop, 1990). As part of the research for that book, I interviewed Myers in December 1988, and in several subsequent telephone conversations. All quotations in this piece come from those interviews and from the transcript of his speech at the ALAN breakfast at the St. Louis NCTE convention.

Myers was born in the small town of Martinsburg, West Virginia, a few years prior to World War II when Americans, and African Americans in particular, were still suffering the effects of the Great Depression. His mother died in childbirth when he was two, leaving his father to cope with supporting a large family on a very limited income. At the age of three Walter was informally adopted by Herbert and Florence Dean and taken to Harlem where he grew up as their son. It was in their honor that he adopted, with the publication of his second book *The Dancers* (1969), the name Walter Dean Myers. His given name was Walter Milton Myers. His first book for children was a picture book, *Where Does the Day Go?* (1969). He created the manuscript for submission to the first contest sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. The Council's purpose was to encourage the publication of more books by writers from so-called minority groups. Myers's manuscript featured a black father on a sunset walk in the park with his son and multicultural group of neighborhood children curious about what causes night and day. It was selected the winner

in the picture book category and was published the next year by Parents Magazine Press.

Myers had not set out to be a children's book writer; at the time of the contest he had been writing short stories, a number of which had been published in magazines. His writing career had begun about the time he was in fifth grade. As a very young child, he had a severe speech impediment. He relates that, when he was a little boy, his speech was so unusual that "People in the neighborhood would give me money to talk . . . and for dancing on the street corner." His parents understood him, however, and he was fine until he went to school. In his words: "I knew I had speech difficulties. People kept saying, 'Oh, Walter, speak slower,' or 'Is your son foreign-born, Mrs. Dean?' But when I went to school, school became a traumatic experience for me. The speech problems were just overwhelming my life."

Myers's response to the emotions brought on by other children's reactions to his speech problems was to act out—to fight, to behave in ways that "make a teacher's life a thing of misery." When his fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Conway, caught him reading comic books in the back of the room one day, she tore them up and brought in for him a stack of what she called "good books," thereby introducing him to the kind of literature valued in schools. She also required that students read orally, but, understanding Walter's difficulties, she permitted him to write his own reading material. He chose to write poems that avoided the speech sounds which gave him difficulty, and he has been writing ever since.

One area that never gave him difficulty was reading. His mother, Florence Dean, taught him to read when he was a pre-schooler: "I was about four years old, and what we read was *True Romance* magazines. I loved them. I didn't always understand them. I didn't know how those people could get their breasts to heave. Somehow I couldn't get mine to heave at all." In addition to the romance magazines, Walter's literary diet included Classic Comics and the oral stories told to him by his father and grandfather. His father's stories were deliciously scary, but his grandfather's were "God's-gonna-get-you stories straight from the Old Testament"—stories, for example, about how God punished the Children of Israel for their transgressions and about the infinite patience of Job.

By the time he reached high school, reading and writing were providing for Myers more satisfaction—and more education, since his school attendance was sporadic at best—than schooling itself. One bright spot in school was his tenth-grade English teacher, Mrs. Bonnie Liebow. She interviewed all her students and created individualized

reading lists for each of them. Through her list, and through his own explorations at the George Bruce Branch of the New York Public Library, Myers discovered and devoured the novels and poems of writers such as Thomas Mann, Honoré Balzac, James Joyce, Rupert Brooke—white, male, for the most part European. These writers in turn had an influence on Myers as author. He recalls that, early in his own writing career, because these were the only writers he had come to know, "What I wanted to be was a white European. I spent much of my early writing trying to write like a white European." It wasn't until he discovered the work of Langston Hughes, who lived in Harlem about a half mile from Myers, that he realized that it was possible to create stories based on his own neighborhood and his own people. "When I read Langston Hughes's works for the first time, that freed me up, and so did James Baldwin's wonderful short stories. Their work said to me 'You can write about black life.' Langston Hughes wrote about my own neighborhood. He talked about places I could go and look at."

With few exceptions, his best-known work has tapped into the roots of his own life, his own time and place and culture. Five of his novels have been humorous stories about groups of young people growing up in the city. The first of those, the episodic *Fast Sam* (1975), began as a short story. In the early seventies when Myers was writing picture books, he was also still writing short fiction. One night at a party he met Linda Zuckerman, then an editor with Viking. "Linda had seen a short story I had written. She said to me, 'I saw the first chapter of your novel. How does the rest of it go?' I made up something, and she said, 'Send me a two-page outline, and we'll see what we can do.' I left the party, went down the hall and wrote an outline, and she bought the book." Myers had become a novelist.

His five humorous urban novels—*Fast Sam* (1975), *Mojo and the Russians* (1977), *The Young Landlords* (1979), *Won't Know Till I Get There* (1988), *The Mouse Rap* (1990)—present a picture of the Harlem Myers remembers from his youth—a place of warmth and laughter, of basketball and sandlot baseball, of Bible school in summer and Sunday school all year. It was the cultural capital of black America—Langston Hughes, Josephine Baker, and Sugar Ray Robinson lived there or visited; the Apollo Theater and the Schomburg Culture Center were there; churches large and small were everywhere. The church Myers attended was the place where the Dance Theater of Harlem began, as did a program that was the precursor to the Peace Corps.

Myers incorporates names, experiences, and events from his own

life and times into these books. As one example, here is Myers talking about *The Mouse Rap* at the time he was completing it:

> My father, Herbert Dean, worked for a while in a moving company that was one of the legitimate businesses of Dutch Schultz, the 1930's gangster. I was reminded of that when I watched the television show in which Geraldo Rivera was opening a vault hoping to find Al Capone's loot. So in this new book, I combine the two ideas. A group of kids in Harlem go looking for a treasure . . . I love that book. I love the language in the book. I really played with it more than I've ever done before.

It is not incidental, then, that as the story unfolds, Mouse and his friends learn that the grandfather of one of the girls had worked for a time in the legitimate moving business of Tiger Moran, or that Dutch Schultz is mentioned as being the head of a rival gang, or that one of the workers the grandfather remembers is named Herbert. It is also not incidental that Mouse's full name is Frederick Douglass, the same as that of the great nineteenth-century African American orator and freedom fighter whose last name is spelled Douglass. Myers frequently incorporates names from African American history and culture into his books.

Myers's reference to the language of *The Mouse Rap* calls attention to one of the finely honed aspects of his craft. Whether engaging in outlandish puns, or creating a faithful rendering of the informal vernacular of urban black male teenagers, or reproducing natural-sounding dialogue, his keen ear for oral language and his love of language play are evident in all his fiction.

Not all of Myers's books are light and humorous. Some, such as *It Ain't All for Nothin'* (1978), *Motown and Didi* (1984), and *Scorpions* (1988) focus on characters who are profoundly affected by the environment in which they live. The ready availability of drugs, a lack of money, and the temptation to use violence as a means to achieve power—all are facts of life in some city neighborhoods, and Myers's characters in those books are faced with making choices about effective ways to cope. Most of those books are marked by Myers's deep sense of compassion and by his holding out an attitude of hopefulness.

The award-winning *Scorpions* (1988), however, is less hopeful than the earlier books. Eleven-year-old Jamal, whose brother is in prison, acquires a gun when he is persuaded to try to take over his brother's attorney's fees. Part of the book is about the warm and innocent friendship between Jamal and his Puerto Rican friend Tito. But when the inevitable tragedy occurs, although Tito survives, the friendship is one of the casualties. Jamal is also a survivor, but at the end of the

book his future is uncertain. When asked if this is an indication that his own views of Harlem have changed, Myers replied:

> I got the idea from working with some teen-age boys. A couple of years ago I did a workshop for teen-age boys in Harlem, teaching creative writing. . . . It has changed. It's so sad now. When I think of the Harlem that was my neighborhood, it's very different. My house has been torn down. The church has built offices there. The other houses are still there. But it's the nights. There used to be people sitting outside, but they're all gone. They're afraid to be outside. You walk down 125th Street, and it's all shuttered up. It's so sad because it used to be such a vibrant place. There was always something going on. Now the drugs are killing, the drugs are so bad, and I don't see any answers.

Some of Myers's books are set outside Harlem, and not all of them are about African Americans. He has done a series of four adventure books set in some of the places he has traveled: Hong Kong, Egypt, Peru, and Spain. These books, whose protagonists are the teenaged sons of a white female archaeologist, are light and entertaining. He has also written a more substantial novel, *The Nicholas Factor* (1983), about a white college student who joins an elite group of bright students and goes with the group to Peru as an undercover observer for a government intelligence agency.

He has received wide critical acclaim for his Vietnam War novel, *Fallen Angels* (1988). The Horn Book reviewer compared it to Stephen Crane's Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, in its verisimilitude (Heins, 1988). But like Crane, Myers had not been in combat. When asked how he could create such a convincing war novel, he talked about the combination of imagination and building on similar experiences: "Whatever you can imagine, you can do. I had points of reference—my own military training, war games. I've sat in foxholes in the middle of the night for hours. I also knew what to stay away from. There are a lot of bad books on the subject."

For younger readers, Myers has written a novel with Little League baseball as a framework. In *Me, Mop, and the Moondance Kid* (1988), Mop (Miss Olivia Parish), wants desperately to be adopted before the home for orphans where she grew up is closed and she will have to move away from the neighborhood. T. J., who with his younger brother, the Moondance Kid, had also lived at the home until their recent adoption, needs to improve his baseball skills so he can play ball with his new father. It's Moondance, however, who is the baseball player in the family. The kids find ways to help each other solve their problems.

Myers's versatility also extends to nonfiction, science fiction, and

fantasy. His high fantasy adventure features Tarik, the Muslim conqueror after whom the Rock of Gibraltar is named. Very little information is available in English about the actual Tarik, so Myers created his legend from his own imagination. In *The Legend of Tarik* (1981), the hero is a young African who seeks revenge on El Muerte, the human monster who slaughtered Tarik's family and many of his people.

One of his more daring projects has been a novel with some workbook-like features. *Sweet Illusions* (1986) was published by the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. In keeping with their focus on teaching writing, the book invites its readers to complete each chapter by writing in a given form—for example, a letter to another character or a lullaby. The book is about teenage pregnancy, and each chapter is written in the voice of someone whose life is touched by such a situation—a teenaged mother, a prospective grandparent, an adolescent father, and a social worker. The book works in spite of its workbook aspects because Myers has created characters who are honest, believable, and engaging.

Myers is a prolific writer, having set himself a goal of producing ten pages on a working day. When he first became a full-time writer, he says, "I had to define work because I'm the kind of person who, if I don't have a job, I'm not a good person. So I said, 'What's work? Eight hours a day is work.' Then I would sit around thinking about writing and ask, 'Is this work? Am I working?' Finally I got to the point where I said if I do ten pages, that's work. Ten pages works just fine. I think that the biggest stumbling block is not the quality of your writing, it's getting the book done, so I go straight ahead. Most of my writing is the rewrite."

He loves his work, and when I asked him what he does to relax, he answered, "I write. If I'm working on something, and I feel that that day's over, I may write something else for fun. I also have a flute." He's a self-taught flutist, is learning to read music, and is teaching himself guitar. Always, though, the subject comes back to his writing. Myers is full of plans for future works. He says he usually keeps three or four projects going. At the time of the interview he was working on a book of nursery rhymes and completing the first draft of a book on black history. He likes to tackle subjects he thinks have been neglected. One of his projects is to do a book featuring a character like Sam Cook or Marvin Gaye, both of whom started their musical careers in the church and became popular singers. This is an aspect of black life he thinks has been ignored in books.

Another theme that is very important to him is that of the black

community as a source of help for its members. "In so many books that have been well-meaning, there was always a relationship that was left out. A white can help a white; a black can help a white, but a black cannot help a black. I find that a very precious relationship, so I want to put that in my books. I feel good about the character Joyce in Langston Hughes's 'Simple' books—the way she understood Simple's problems. I think that's not being touched by most writers. So many male writers want to write the great American novel, and it has to be almost inaccessible; it's supposed to knock you down. I don't see myself as having that kind of power, but even if I did I would rather not be that kind of writer. I would like to be a writer like Langston Hughes."

Myers has chosen large shoes to fill; but in his authentic rendering of the everyday lives of ordinary African Americans, in his unerring ear for their language, and in his love of his people and his work, he is at the very least walking in Hughes's footsteps.

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2 *Novelists*

Cynthia Voigt

Dorothy Kauffman

Like many contemporary women, Cynthia Voigt, recipient of the 1983 Newbery Medal, must constantly juggle the roles of wife, mother, and teacher. Theoretically, her day is constructed so that her husband Walter and two children, Jessica and Peter, go off to school at eight o'clock, and she has the remainder of the morning, till noon, to write.

Cynthia's own school involvement dictates that she prepare for and teach one class a day on what she calls a "cup-cake schedule."[1] Reality, however, must have its own way, so Cynthia's daily schedules end up as cluttered as ours—what with shopping, family responsibilities, class preparations, the grading of papers, and participating in conferences—and those four hours devoted to writing get nibbled at constantly.

Cynthia herself compares modern life to a Gordian knot and her answer to the situation is something "sharp, quick, and definitive," as Alexander the Great's. In Cynthia's case, this sharp, quick, definitive response is the process of writing.

Reviewers and readers readily agree that Cynthia's characters are clearly drawn; her writing is sophisticated and volatile; her word choice is precise; her ability to establish intense emotional levels is keenly developed. Kathleen Leverich in the *New York Times Book Review* stated that *Homecoming* "is a glowing book," and the writing contains "capability, cleverness, and determination" that makes reading the book an "enthralling journey."

[1] The quotations used in this article are from a taped interview with Cynthia Voigt, October 26, 1984, in Annapolis, Maryland.

It is writing itself which permeates the person of Cynthia Voigt. She openly recognizes the importance of writing in her life and admits when she is not writing, she tends to "screw up in everything else. I get very grouchy." It is the writing—the making of something—that helps order her world.

Cynthia's tenacious belief in the worth of her writing convinced her to keep going for over two decades. She decided she wanted to be a writer in ninth grade. "But deciding you want to do it and getting somebody to buy something you've written is a long time. I was thirty-seven when I sold my first book."

Cynthia, like many other writers, states, "I don't know where I get my ideas." She can report that the idea for *Homecoming* began at the grocery store. "You always see kids in cars in grocery store parking lots. One day I saw these kids in cars and thought, 'What would happen if . . . ?' I went home and wrote it down. A year later I wrote the story."

The impetus behind *Tell Me if the Lovers Are Losers* occurred one night when she was having dinner with several friends. Though she did not wear glasses at the time, as they passed around each other's glasses and looked through them, she found she could not focus through a pair of really thick ones. Knowing the owner was a basketball player, she asked, "How do you play basketball with these?" He responded, "No problem." But he did recall a similar accident in high school where a "wonderful, dead-eye shot basketball player" got glasses and could no longer play. "I thought, 'Wow!' and that was the basis for the story."

Both *Dicey's Song* (the book that won the Newbery Medal) and *A Solitary Blue* grew out of the work of *Homecoming*. By the end of *Homecoming*, she knew *Dicey's Song* was next. *A Solitary Blue* developed as soon as the character of Jeff was thought out.

Dreams are sometimes the sources for stories, so writers say. Well, Cynthia's story of *The Callender Papers* originated that way. Though she admits that most of her dreams written down do not get anywhere, a dream formed the foundation for this mystery. "I'm prone to Gothic dreams and at the time I felt I needed to work on plotting. A Gothic novel needs a plot. Write this one!"

The origin for *Building Blocks* resided in her own home; she had only to recognize its presence. Her son Peter, who was quite young at the time, frequently played with the large, lightweight cardboard building blocks familiar to most two-year-olds. One night Walter constructed a rather large fortress with them. The next morning when Peter and Cynthia came downstairs, there it was! Peter (also known

as Duffle) reacted immediately and crawled into the inviting structure. "There are stories where you go through a door. As Duffle crawled in, I thought, 'What would happen if . . . ?'"

Cynthia's most recent title, *The Runner*, is another Tillerman story that she knew from the beginning of the series she would write . . . "once I figured out what I was doing with [the characters]." The next book that will be published is *Jackaroo*, a book she refers to as "my Zorro book."

When asked to identify the reason her stories are set in the East and much of the state of Maryland, her response is multilayered. Cynthia grew up in Connecticut, went to boarding school and college in Massachusetts, lived in Pennsylvania for a while, and is now living in Annapolis, Maryland. Essentially, then, her books reveal an autobiographical geography. "I think what it comes down to is there are some parts of the world that just strike you as extremely lovely. If I were a sculptor, somehow I'd want to express this; if I were a painter (which I'd love to be), I'd want to paint them. What I want to do is wrap my words around them."

Cynthia values the "everyman-kind-of-state" quality that Maryland has. "It is rural and urban. It has a southwestern sense of sky. It has both mountains and water but is not distinguished like Colorado with its mountains and pure air. You can find a lot of things in Maryland."

Until now, most of her stories are set in actual places. An exception to this is *The Callender Papers* where the setting is purely fictional, but "it's supposed to have the feel of the Berkshires." When Cynthia creates settings, she finds she has to draw maps, "and, as my students will tell you, I can't draw maps. Frequently I'll find that what I want to do can't work in the map I've drawn, so if I change it I have to change everything because I have to visualize it." Working with real settings is much preferred to made-up ones." Although this is true, Cynthia admits that *Jackaroo* (due in the fall of 1985) and *Izzy—Willy Nilly* (due in the spring of 1986) are also set in fictional locations.

This tendency to lay the foundation for story in reality extends to other aspects of Cynthia's writing too. She states she feels much happier when part of the story is based on fact. "My parents moved to Sewickley, Pennsylvania, and lived there until recently. It's a real town." Consequently, the settings in *Building Blocks* are true—the town, the cemetery, the caves, and the Ohio River (which really is much cleaner now than it was twenty years ago.) "I've been in those caves. But on hindsight, I can't figure out why I was down there. There was one place, just about a sacrificial slab, and you had to get down on your back just to get across the slab. I went down there with my

boyfriend who said he knew the caves. Years later I found out . . . he didn't."

Because her settings are most frequently actual places, and because her characters are termed "original," "intriguing," and "outstanding" by reviewers who recognize Cynthia's ability to create believable, "real" people, one wonders where these characters originate.

"In some cases a character may be part of my self, but not really." To the extent that Dicey is the kind of kid Cynthia would have liked to have been and that Gram's the kind of lady she would like to be, the characters may be a kind of wish fulfillment. In some ways, Cynthia admits, the character of Sammy is similar to her son, but she quickly adds, "Only similar." Her characters take on their own lives—sometimes by a gesture or a telling point—and then they fill out into persons of their own.

Cynthia describes her connection with her characters as "pulling out a thin piece of torte," or "like with kids in a class. You have an insight that will enable you to connect even though you can't really explain who they are. You can't pin them down as to who they are, but you can connect with who they are, talk to them and see what they're trying to communicate. It's that narrow sliver connection from which you intuit outwards. I think that's how most of my characters are connected and absolutely different."

Characterization is alluring for Cynthia, as a writer, teacher, and individual. "I really like the question of 'who people are.' It's a fascinating question because people don't duplicate. They're like snowflakes. You can't ever really know them. But you can learn things about them. Characters are wonderful. Aristotle said characters are easiest. I agree. I really like my characters . . . .[I] would not be surprised if they'd all come and knock on my door and tell me I've done it all wrong."

Perhaps because, as Aristotle said, plot is hardest and because Cynthia agrees, she finds herself wrestling with plot. The outlined plot for *Homecoming* was a series of dates and a map of red dots. *A Solitary Blue* was envisioned as two long discussion/storytelling chapters with a third chapter that was to be epigrammatic in nature. She had a rhythm of storytelling with an epilog-prelude-commentary pattern in mind. It was the editor who reconstructed the material, especially the beginning of the story.

Cynthia purports that stories, for her, have a shape and declare their own terms. "My job is to figure out what they are. A story never really says 'Yes.' It's like Socrates' daimon: it never says it's true. But when it says 'No,' you know you'd better listen. I can't be sure when

a story is ringing true, but I know when it's ringing false. This happens when I put too much of myself in it."

In terms of plot, Cynthia admires the writing of Dick Francis, who writes convincing, clever, complex, cantilevered plots. She also declares that "nobody had done a Sherwood Anderson trick for me. In the beginning of *Winesburg, Ohio,* he says it's like a door opening and suddenly there he was and he could do it." The plumb line against which Cynthia measures her own writing, however, is Shakespeare. "Measure yourself against Shakespeare. Most of us come out in the satisfactory category—which is not bad at all."

Winning the Newbery Medal was both "wonderful and appalling" for Cynthia. For her, the Newbery award is somewhat like Olympus, yet simultaneously the opposite. "For the Olympics there is training with a stop watch. A literary award, on the other hand, is chancy. You can't measure the achievement, for there is no sense of having earned it. With literary awards, it becomes a matter of with whom you stand, not where."

Winning awards does not get Cynthia to the typewriter. After winning the Newbery, it was four months till she got down to writing again.

What does push Cynthia to the typewriter is her own personal desire to write. "I write for children because I want to write. I don't consider myself a good storyteller, and I have no burning stories to tell. I have no solutions to the problems of the world. I think there are solutions for individual people and individual circumstances. My writing is my way of saying, 'Have you looked at it this way?' I do it. I enjoy it." She confesses, "It's a razzle-dazzle kind of fun to have a story come out and do well. That's wonderful. But it's only when you're up there working when it's actually real: that's what the whole thing is rooted in, and that's the only thing that actually counts."

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Dicey's Song. Atheneum. 1982. (Newbery Medal, 1983.)
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[Language Arts 62, no. 8 (1985): 876–79]

Recent Publications

1990 *On Fortune's Wheel*
1989 *Tree by Leaf*

1989 *Seventeen against the Dealer*
1987 *Sons from Afar*
1986 *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*
1986 *Stories about Rosie*
1986 *Come a Stranger*
1985 *The Runner*
1985 *Jackaroo*

3 *Novelists*

In Memoriam: E. B. White

Lee Bennett Hopkins

On Tuesday, October 1, 1985, at the age of eighty-five, E. B. White, a man who shared so much with countless numbers of children and adults, died of Alzheimer's disease at his home in North Brooklin, Maine, where he had lived for nearly fifty years.

Elwyn Brooks White was born on July 11, 1899, in Mount Vernon, New York, the sixth and last child of Samuel Tilly and Jessica Hart White. The family occupied a spacious house atop Chester Hill at the corner of Summit and Sydney Avenues. His family moved there in 1891, from Brooklyn, New York, because "Mount Vernon sounded tonier."

In 1921, after graduating from Cornell University, he worked in New York City for a year before traveling around the country. After five to six years, trying many kinds of jobs, he joined the staff of *The New Yorker* magazine, in 1926, when the now- prestigious publication was still in its diaper stage. Mr. White regularly contributed satire, poems, essays, and editorials. His connection with *The New Yorker* proved to be a particularly happy one. In 1929, he met and married Katherine Sergeant Angell, *The New Yorker*'s first fiction editor. He continuously wrote for the magazine and was still on the staff, working from his home in Maine, shortly before his death.

His first book, *The Lady Is Cold*, a volume of adult poetry, was published in 1929; from then on, his writing appeared regularly.

After living in Manhattan in the 1920s and 1930s, Mr. White and his wife moved in 1938, to his farm in North Brooklin, Maine. It was there where he wrote his three enchanting, enduring tales for children, *Stuart Little* (1945), *Charlotte's Web* (1952), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970).

Stuart Little tells of a heroic little mouse with human qualities born to the Little family, *real* people-people. The parents, and their first son George, accept the situation rather calmly and make the necessary adjustments to raise a mouse-son. Mr. White created the book in hope of amusing a six-year-old niece, but before he finished it, she had grown up!

"It took me about twelve years to do *Stuart*," he recalled, "but most of the time I did not think I was writing a book. I was busy with other matters."

The text was submitted to Ursula Nordstrom, Harper & Row's juvenile editor. Ms. Nordstrom remembers the difficulty of finding an artist to do justice to the text: "The drawings for *Stuart Little* posed a tremendous challenge. I tried several well-known artists but was horrified by most of the results. Some drew "Stuart" as a rather Disney-like creation; others drew him in extremely contemporary clothes. From time-to-time I sent Mr. White samples. He agreed they were all impossible.

"Garth Williams was the eighth artist we tried. Garth had not yet illustrated a book. He loved the manuscript and asked for a couple of weeks to work out his characterization of "Stuart." As he worked and as we talked about the book on the telephone, I began to feel a little relaxed for the first time about the problem of the illustrations. It was a thrilling day when his sketches came in. Mr. White loved them as much as I did."

Prior to the book's publication, galley sheets were sent to Anne Carroll Moore, doyenne of the children's book world, who had just retired as the head children's librarian at the New York Public Library—a woman who exerted great influence at the library and among publishers. Ms. Moore hated the story and wrote a friend saying, "I was never so disappointed in a book in my life." She also told Ursula Nordstrom that *Stuart Little* "mustn't be published," and wrote a fourteen-page letter to Katherine White urging her to persuade her husband not to publish the book.

Of course, Ms. Moore called this project wrong! One year after the publication of *Stuart Little*, Ursula Nordstrom wrote Mr. White that sales had reached 100,000 copies. Astonished, he wrote back: "I feel like the millionth person through a turnstile— dazed and happy. Dear me, 100,000 books! It's a little indecent, isn't it? When I recover from my 100,000th head cold, which is now upon me, I'd like to take you to a Milestone Luncheon at some fashionable restaurant in celebration. You can eat 100,000 stalks of celery, and I'll swallow 100,000 olives. It will be the E. B. White-Ursula Nordstrom Book and Olive Luncheon."

With the note, a gift of caviar—"guaranteed to contain 100,000 sturgeon eggs," was included. By 1975, the book had sold over one-half million hardcover copies.

Seven years later, Mr. White and Mr. Williams teamed again to produce the modern classic, *Charlotte's Web*, the tale of Charlotte, a large, grey spider, who sets out to save the life of her dearest friend, Wilbur, a pig.

Mr. White related how *Charlotte's Web* came about.

"I like animals and my barn is a very pleasant place to be, at all hours. One day when I was on my way to feed the pig, I began feeling sorry for the pig, because, like most pigs, he was doomed to die. This made me sad. So I started thinking of ways to save a pig's life. I had been watching a big, grey spider at her work and was impressed by how clever she was at weaving. Gradually I worked the spider into the story—a story of friendship and salvation on a farm.

"Before attempting the book . . . I studied spiders and boned up on them. I watched Charlotte at work, here on my place, and I also read books about the life of spiders, to inform myself about their habits, their capabilities, their temperament . . . Having finished (the book) I was dissatisfied with it, so instead of submitting it to my publisher, I laid it aside for a while, then rewrote it introducing Fern and other characters. This took a year, but it was a year well spent."

His legion of fans had to wait almost another two decades before *The Trumpet of the Swan* appeared.

"I don't know how or when the idea of *The Trumpet of the Swan* occurred to me," he told me. "I guess I must have wondered what it would be like to be a trumpeter swan and not be able to make a noise."

Not to be able to make a noise! All one has to do is delve into two volumes, *Letters of E. B. White* and *Poems and Sketches of E. B. White*, to witness what kinds of noise he *could* make. Both books are filled with White-whimsy.

About his writing he once commented: "Sometimes I'm asked how old I was when I started to write, and what made me want to write. I started early—as soon as I could spell. In fact, I can't remember any time in my life when I wasn't busy writing. I don't know what caused me to do it, or why I enjoyed it, but I think children often find pleasure and satisfaction in trying to set their thoughts down on paper, either in words or in pictures. I was no good at drawing, so I used words instead. As I grew old- er, I found that writing can be a way of earning a living . . . Are my stories true, you ask? No, they are imaginary tales, containing fantastic characters and events. In *real* life, a family

doesn't have a child who looks like a mouse; in *real* life, a swan doesn't blow a trumpet. But real life is only one kind of life—there is also the life of the imagination. And although my stories are imaginary, I like to think that there is some truth in them too—truth about the way people and animals feel and think and act."

Awards and honors bestowed upon Mr. White could well fill several pages. To name a few, *Charlotte's Web* was designated a 1953 Newbery Honor Book; in 1963 President John F. Kennedy named him one of thirty-one Americans to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest honor a civilian can receive from the government in time of peace; in 1970 he was given the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for both *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*, an award presented to "an author or illustrator whose books, published in the United States, have over a period of years made a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children"; in 1971 he received the National Medal for Literature given by the National Book Committee; in 1978 he was given a special Pulitzer Prize for the body of his work. He also held honorary degrees from many colleges and universities.

I once asked Mr. White if there was one award in particular that was the most meaningful. He replied, "The best award is a letter from a child or an adult."

In his acceptance speech for the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award (*The Horn Book*, September, 1970, page 350), he stated: "I have two or three strong beliefs about the business of writing for children. I feel I must never kid them about anything. I feel I must be on solid ground myself. I also feel that a writer has an obligation to transmit, as best as he can, his love of life, his appreciation for the world. I am not averse to departing from reality, but I am against departing from the truth."

I also asked him if there was anything else he felt a child would like to know about him. "Sure," he said, "but I'm not telling."

Toward the end of *Charlotte's Web*, Charlotte says to Wilbur: "After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die . . . By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."

Via his beautiful pen, E. B. White helps each of us to lift up our own lives much more than just a trifle; via his books, he will continue to.

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4 *Translators*

Anthea Bell

Ronald A. Jobe

Have you noticed the name of a translator on the title page of a book recently?

Have you even considered the importance of a professional translator for a children's book?

Have you ever contemplated how a translator translates a book?

Did you know that you have been enjoying the popular character, Astérix, for the last twenty years thanks to the adept translation skills of Anthea Bell? Yes, Astérix the Gaul recently marked his thirtieth anniversary by the publication of René De Goscinny's twenty-eighth book of his adventures, *Astérix and the Magic Carpet* (1988), in English. Translating a literary work such as Astérix the Gaul into English, with such skill that readers think the writer must have written in English, requires an especially gifted person. Anthea Bell is just such a person and has been widely recognized for her translations. In 1987, she received the prestigious Schlegel-Tietk Award, given by the West German government for the most outstanding translation from German into English. It is for one of the few children's books so honored; for Willi Fährmann's *The Long Journey of Lukas B.*

Anthea Bell is also known for her translations of *Konrad* and *The Cat and Mouse Who Shared a House*. Both books have received the Mildred Batchelder Award from the American Library Association for the best children's book in translation. To date, Anthea has translated over 230 titles for adults and children. These range from children's

books such as Otfried Preussler's humorous *The Robber Hotzenplotz* or his sombre *The Satanic Mill* to Michael Ende's *Ophelia's Shadow Theatre* to such adult works as Stephan Aust's *The Baader-Meinhoff Group*, Henri Troyant's novel *The Web* and Evelyne Keitel's *Reading Psychosis: Strategies of Communication in Psychopathographic Texts*. A vast four-volume work of German social history has kept her occupied on and off for years. Most are translations from the German or French; however, her reading knowledge of Dutch and Scandinavian languages has also permitted translations in these languages.

It was *Astérix the Gaul*, however, that catapulted Anthea Bell's name into the forefront as a translator. She became involved with the Astérix series by chance. Several of Britain's leading publishers had been offered the books by the French publisher but turned them down, thinking they would never sell in England. Brockhampton Press, a small firm, decided to take a chance and the editor asked Anthea Bell to team up with Derek Hockridge to try to translate the books. Astérix was an immediate success!

This was not Anthea Bell's first translation since she started translating children's books when Oliver Jones, editor at Methuen asked the Children's Officer of the National Book League if he knew someone who could read German and also knew about children. He did! His wife! Anthea was requested to report on the suitability for English publication of several books the editor had received from European publishers. Eventually she was asked to translate those that she recommended.

Over the last quarter of a century, Anthea Bell reckons that she must have written the equivalent of three full-length novels through her recommendations and reports. The percentage of recommendations she makes is at most one out of three of the total titles screened because she knows how reluctant British publishers are to publish foreign books. Anthea comments, "I have to be so certain that the book is not just good but is something that is so immensely good that it must be done, or something that there is nothing as good or comparable from an English language source." Out of those she recommends only about one third are eventually published.

Anthea theorizes that the lack of translated work is actually a vicious Catch-22 circle. "Publishers are reluctant to publish translated books because they hold that the English-speaking reading public is reluctant to read them, and the public doesn't get to read them because the publishers are reluctant to publish them." She feels it is certainly not due to a lack of good translators or of good children's authors to translate.

She observes that over the last four or five years, the children's books which have been translated tend to be the absolutely safe, sellable titles. Either they are beautifully illustrated picture books or very popular titles such as Astérix. She has worked on more adult translations over the last couple of years simply because so few children's books, except for the most popular, have been published.

The Translation Process

Anthea Bell perceives herself as a chameleon or an actor on paper. "One is interpreting as an actor does, actually trying to be a clear piece of glass, so as not to let yourself show through, only to clarify a passage."

In her translations Anthea Bell always aims to produce "what the author might have written had he been writing in English in the first place." She has usually read the book during the screening process as it is unusual for her to be given something to translate that she had not already read and recommended. Once selected she then rereads it to reestablish the sense of unity of the work. Anthea works chapter by chapter, but in a long work may pause to review beginning parts of the text for consistency. She may have to change the name(s) of something in an earlier section based on what came later. She works straight from the computer keyboard onto the screen and does the revisions on the screen. The word processor is of crucial assistance in this process, as it allows her to print passages however many times are necessary for further revision.

Anthea Bell finds that, initially, translating a work is a slow process because she has to set the style, try to put herself into the skin of the author, and try not to let her natural writing style show through. When translating she often feels that she gets to know authors and their writing better than they do themselves. "When I am translating, I go over something so many times that I have actually picked up a name which got changed in the course of a story, something the editor should have picked up."

Anthea notes that in children's books straight translation is a great rarity because for younger readers it is more desirable and necessary to adapt the text and story to some extent. "I think the challenge in doing things for children is, as with writing for children, to get the child's interest, because the habit of reading will provide so much enjoyment through life."

Picture books are very difficult for the translator because every

single word counts. "With every new book you are setting your style on the first page and this is so important with a picture book because it will probably be read aloud." The Japanese *Little Mermaid* was her most difficult picture book to do as the text had to be cut drastically. In fact, it was one-quarter of Andersen's original text. Needless to say, she did not like doing it. She regards the trend of some British and American editors, taking a literal translation of a foreign work provided by the originating publisher (a "raw" translation) and merely retelling it, as a dangerous practice. The editors do not know the original language and as a result a new version is created which may not be true to the intention of the author.

Anthea Bell has done some retellings, but both were in unique situations. She had to do the English translation for a Japanese text of Swan Lake. This proved quite a challenge as the original literary fairytale is quite unlike the ballet. She also found that there was simply no text in any European language of this Japanese version. Consequently there was the question of devising a story to tell the tale of the ballet in a style which would fit both the illustration of the text and the format. For her version of the Nutcracker, she carefully went back over Hoffman's German text. The length of the proposed book was the reason she had to resort to retelling, compounded by the fact that the illustrations were for the original French story, not the ballet. Consequently, the much shorter version resulted in an interesting mix of styles. Anthea makes it poignantly clear that this process is not regularly done with works of fiction.

Anthea Bell considers that the translation of nonfiction is usually very straightforward. However, if there is something that is unattainable or not very well known, then adapting would be required. She finds that nonfiction can be translated faster than fiction because it does not usually need much of a rough draft, the style being rather straightforward.

Working with a partner on Astérix the Gaul provides for a challenge of a different type. She does the actual translation and Derek Hockridge, her colleague and lecturer in French, advises on the French details—the sort not found in any dictionary. Brevity is the real challenge as the translators are strictly limited in the number of words that can be put into one speech bubble. A French joke may be best translated into longer English; however, it is not possible—it is imperative to keep it concise. "The translation of something which depends as much as Astérix on wordplay and puns has, in any event, to be very free, often more of an adaptation, if anything like the same humorous effect is to be produced in English" (1980, pp. 129–130). The translation duo

attempts to render the ideas as faithfully as possible to give the feel of the original; to follow the spirit of the original, finding jokes which may be different but along the same lines as the French jokes; to try for the same kind of mixture and number of jokes as in the French, where Astérix appeals on a number of different levels; and to have the text fit the expressions on the speaker's faces in Albert Uderzo's wittily detailed drawings (1980, p. 132).

The Challenge of Translation

Translating children's books poses several major problems. Firstly, the translator must judge whether a distinct feeling of foreign background should stay or not. Anthea Bell believes that a translator "... must not put a child off, so one cannot face English children with a street name spelled Vaekkesekovvej, or they will be turned off." She believes that if names can't be understood then the translator must change them; for example, Vaekkesekovvej would become a more comprehensible Brookwood Road. With German books especially, she tries not to have any personal names that are too difficult for English children to pronounce. If they are clearly too difficult, she will change them and try something a little more international, such as Lisa. The degree of foreignness will depend upon the story and the illustrations. When Bell translates books for older children, she tries to retain the foreignness, but with those titles for younger readers she tries to "veil over the fact that it is set in a particular city and make it appear that it could be any large metropolis."

Secondly, the length of a novel to be translated can pose problems. When this occurs she needs to get permission from the author to cut the work. Willi Fahrmann's, *The Long Journey of Lukas B*, had to be cut considerably and, after consultation about it, Willi actually did some of it himself. Even then, some editorial changes were done in the U.S. after she had it down to an acceptable length. Another major challenge for her in this book was the necessity of devising a mode of speech for the yarn- spinning old seaman, the ship's sailmaker. He spoke standard high German in the original edition. Somehow, when it was translated into the English, it did not seem right. The author was very helpful to her as she tried to include an element of colloquialism, the kind of thing you might expect of a seaman telling a yarn.

A third challenge for a British translator is to consider the importance of the American market. When assessing differences between British

and American English, Anthea tries to steer a middle course. However, sometimes it cannot be done, especially if there appears to be no mutually acceptable word. In one book the term "milk jug" was a problem as it meant nothing to American children—they use a "cream pitcher." She avoids things which are very American if she knows the book will not be published there and will avoid anything too British if it is.

Fourthly, it often appears to be the small things which cause problems for translators. It is an interesting fact to note that in books for young adults English speakers are far happier to accept the use of Madame and Monsieur in a text, but less tolerant of such Spanish and German equivalents as Frau, Herr, Senor, or Senora. It seems such a delicate thing but editors insist that they be changed, so inevitably some adaptation has to be done. The translation of humorous books may entail adaptation with a vengeance, especially if cramped with puns. You cannot translate a pun and have it remain a pun.

Fifthly, poetry poses another challenge for the translator. Anthea approaches it by doing a literal translation of the German. "This original interpretation looks silly yet one must keep as close as possible to the original, including both illustrations and rhyme. I do a first rough draft and then 'whittle away' at it. It is very nice when it finally comes out as it gets a little bit of the writer's creative feeling, just about as much as a translator ought to get."

The challenge of challenges for a translator arose for Anthea in an amusing "double translation" situation. The French had translated Enid Blyton's "The Famous Five" series into a French setting. It was so popular that they wrote several sequels themselves, all of which are far from genuine Blyton! Hachette turned around and sold these new editions to an English publisher! It was at this point that Anthea was asked to translate them! The task was not quite so easy since she had to translate them first from French into English and then secondly from English into Blytonese! To ascertain her accuracy she even had them checked by the noted Blyton scholar, Sheila Ray!

When a particulary difficult challenge arises, Anthea writes to fellow translators in her international network to seek help. There are many words she has to translate which are not found in dictionaries, such as expressions so up-to-date that a translator living in England would not necessarily have heard or known about them. She also provides help for translators working with English books. Anthea has been active with her colleagues in striving for the rights of translators. The name of a translator on the title page is a mark of professional commitment on the part of the publisher, but it is more than that. It

really matters to a translator such as Anthea that her name appears because this is the only way she will become eligible for the British public lending rights program. In this program translators are permitted to receive up to 30 percent of the writer's fees.

Why Translations?

Anthea Bell believes children require access to translations, ". . . otherwise they are never, while they are children, going to read the best of children's literature of other countries." This is the reason why she asserts that there is a greater case for translation for children than for adults.

She shares the vision with Klaus Flugge of Andersen Press to share the best literature for young people of the German-speaking world. Consequently, Anthea has translated most of the works of the prolific Austrian writer, Christina Nöstlinger. She views Nöstlinger as an important writer that children should know about and read. The amusing *Cucumber King* was the first title she translated, followed by *Konrad*, the fablelike fantasy for young children. This book is the only one of her books which has been successful in the United States, receiving the Mildred Batchelder Award in 1978. *Marrying Off Mother*, one of the numerous family stories for older readers is pure comedy, serious in tone like the best comedies, even though it does not explore some of the social elements found in other novels. All of her books have recognizable Viennese backgrounds; *Fly away Home*, being Nöstlinger's powerful autobiographical account of life in Vienna after World War II. Anthea particularly enjoys *Guardian Ghost*, as in it Nöstlinger has a wonderful eye for the seriousness in a comic family situation. The ghost is of a down-to-earth lady who went to help a Jewish man being beaten by the Nazis and ended up being run over by a tram. Her ghost hung around, making it difficult for the Nazis. "It definitely has some things in it that children ought to know about how the Nazis acted."

Anthea Bell, an avid reader, is also astutely aware of the British literary scene. Although she graduated from Oxford, she now enjoys living in Histon, a suburb of Cambridge. "The longer I live in Cambridge, the more I like the sheer architectural absurdity of its being here at all: all these grand and lovely styles plonked in the middle of the strictly utilitarian East Anglian farming countryside." As she sits at her desk in her den, pondering the many packages of books which arrive for critical comment, engaging in work on a text, or

reading a letter from her English professor son in Tunisia, she is able to look out the window to enjoy a vast stretch of garden filled with flowers, vegetables, pear trees, and cats. Cats? Absolutely, she is a noted breeder of Birman cats, the Sacred Temple Cat of Burma, which because of their Himalayan genes are noted for their Siamese coloring, semi-long-haired coat, and stocky build. These individualistic companions supervise the intense daily routine which marks a translator's life.

Anthea Bell gained a love of words from her father, the originator of the *Times'* crossword puzzles over fifty years ago, but it is her unrelenting drive to use her talent, translation skills, and fluency with words for the betterment of the world we live in which is so noteworthy. What could be more beneficial than to provide English-speaking children with the opportunity to experience the best literature from other countries? Anthea Bell believes in quality books for children and gives a tremendous commitment of time, talent, and energy to that end. All who care about children and reading owe much to this translator extraordinaire! Astérix would be pleased!

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[Language Arts *67, no. 4 (1990): 432–38*]

Recent Publications

1989 *The Floral Companion*

5 *Editors*

Jean Karl

Jean Karl, **On Jean Karl**

I did not set out to be an editor. It was not something I told people I wanted to be when I was a child, or even when I was a college student. A writer, perhaps. Or maybe a journalist of some sort. But as a child I didn't know about editors, and even when I did find out that they existed, I had little idea of what they were. And you can't choose to be something you don't really understand.

I became an editor by lucky accident. I am convinced that most people become what they become largely by accident. In my case I had taken enough education courses to get a secondary teaching certificate. But practice teaching convinced me that I did not belong at the front of a junior high school English class.

"Maybe," said the head of the English department at my college, "you would like to work for a publisher." He had little more idea of what that work might be than I did. But the idea had appeal. I loved books. Surely people who worked for publishers did something with books. So I wrote to fifty publishers, most of them in New York. I became an item in at least forty-five New York files that were never looked at again.

But the publishers in Chicago, where my family lived, said, "Come in and see us." So I did. And eventually I went to work in the training department at Scott, Foresman, as a junior editorial assistant. Eventually I became an assistant editor in the reading department (Dick and Jane, etc.) and at the end was working on some elementary social studies texts.

At Scott, Foresman I began to learn what an editor is and does. I learned about copyediting, proofreading, galleys, page proofs, art and

what kind of art reproduces well, what you can and cannot do when a book is on the press, and most of all, I learned that an editor can see the good and bad in a work in a way that an author cannot. In looking for material to adapt for readers, I read an enormous number of children's books and magazines. I saw what was good and what was not, and I realized that what was not very good could sometimes be made better.

From Scott, Foresman, I went to Abingdon Press as editor of children's books. At that time some Abingdon offices were in New York City, and mine was. I succeeded Edith Patterson Meyer, who had started the department. At Abingdon, I learned the difference between textbook and tradebook publishing. There was less time and money to be spent on trade books. But there was more freedom to let a work determine its own form. There were no word counts, recommended lengths, no lessons to be learned from the material. But there were lots of unsolicited manuscripts to be read and most of the time rejected. Yet not everything had to go back, for I had already learned that sometimes manuscripts that showed promise could be made better. Many elements of editing and book production were much the same as those I had known. But now for the first time I really encountered authors and experienced the author/editor relationship. An editor, I soon learned, does not have the emotional involvement in a piece of writing that an author does and consequently can be a more objective judge of what is there and what is not. But it is the author's emotional involvement with the work that gives that work life. So an editor must tread lightly, if the work is not to be destroyed.

Finally, I went to start the children's book department at Atheneum. It was a frightening experience because there were no precedents to follow, no books really in the works to just take over; at the same time, even as I worried over what might happen, I knew that I had been given a rare and glorious opportunity to put into practice all I had learned about children's books and about being an editor and that whatever happened I would certainly learn more about both.

Now, over twenty-five years after those early days at Atheneum, I find I can almost look at editing as an editor looks at manuscripts, objectively. And I think that at last I begin to really know what an editor is. An editor is not one person, but many. An editor must have standards and goals, but must at the same time allow authors to be themselves, to work at what feels comfortable to them, to be what each author can best be; an editor must try to give each author the help and advice and care and concern that will assist that author to produce the very best books possible—this often means being a

different person to each author, while at the same time maintaining a certain objectivity. Consequently, an editor has many manifestations.

An editor is an evaluator, a person who reads a manuscript and decides its future with that publishing house. Maybe the editor thinks the manuscript is terrible (common); or maybe she thinks it can be a book but it needs to be better than it is now if it is to succeed: the author needs help (less common); or maybe she thinks it is perfect as it is (almost never happens); or maybe she likes it but knows that her publisher, for unknown reasons, does not seem to sell that sort of book very well, so it is best to pass it by (happens more often than you might think). The editor may even decide that a manuscript is good, publishable, but not the kind of book she likes and therefore it ought to go to someone else. An editor needs to evaluate herself and her own responses as well as manuscripts.

For those books an editor likes and believes that her publishing house might be able to sell, the editor becomes a critic. A critic who uses her opportunity to be an Encourager, a Teacher, an Enabler and a Challenger for the author. The Encourager says, "You can do it—your monster is magnificent. Now all you have to do is create a really good story around it and you'll have a splendid book. You have a great talent, use it." The Teacher says, "You have good ideas. I like it when your monster swallows the Earth. But I don't think you ought to tell your story in the form of a nursery rhyme. You need to use language that convinces us that this can really happen. Here, let me give you an idea of how you might want to handle this in a better way. And why don't you read . . ." The Enabler says, "Just because no one has ever written a book about a monster the size of the universe does not mean that you can't do it. You don't have to be like any other author, not even a best-selling author. Just be yourself. Be free. Do what you want to do. Say what you want to say. Don't be afraid to be different, as long as you give your audience something they can understand." And the Challenger says, "You think that's the best you can do? Just because you've revised your monster epic ten times, and it has gone from being a six-page nursery rhyme to a two-hundred-page novel, you think you've done all you can? You haven't even started. Now you've got the form, the shape, the outline. Now you have to begin to create a masterpiece." The editor as critic can also be one more thing: wrong. Editors are people. They sometimes make mistakes. A good editor knows this and will listen to justified protests from authors who know what they are doing and why.

Ultimately, the editor is also a sponsor and a promoter. The editor believes in the author and what the author has done. So she tells

everyone in the office and anyone else who could possibly care just how great the author's new book is. And she tries to see to it that as many people as possible see (and buy) the author's book.

Of course the editor is more than this: she fills out forms, she goes to meetings of many kinds—in office and out—she deals with artists and art work for everything from picture books to jackets for far out science fiction novels about universe-sized monsters. But the editor's basic responsibilities are with authors and with what they do and do not do.

It may sound hectic, but it's really a great life. You meet interesting people, have interesting correspondence and conversations, do worthwhile things. You can encourage Lilian Moore to write poetry because you know she can and wants to. You can challenge and enable Phyllis Naylor to use her formidable talents in many ways—to write funny books, serious books, picture books, Young Adult books, whatever seems best to her at the moment. And you can watch her and other authors grow and develop over the years. You can have friendships with people you have never met because you know how their minds work. And you get to read new books by popular authors before anyone else.

Will it change? Has it changed? The business of being an editor. Of course it has. The kinds of books that sell well, the people who are authors, the nature of publishing houses and the business end of publishing change. And the editor must change ideas and to some extent approaches with what happens in the world beyond manuscript, author, and editor. Yet the basic skills and the basic capacity to work with a manuscript and an author do not change. The changes sit on the surface of the book producing process. What rests underneath is the same: understanding, appreciation, and a will to see a work through until it matches the highest vision the author can have for it.

Phyllis Naylor, **On Jean Karl**

Somebody's grandmother is supposed to have said that it's not the big things that matter so much in a marriage, it's the small things. She could have been speaking for an author-editor relationship as well. I don't know how Jean Karl squeezes her toothpaste, but we both like a clean desk top and we both meet deadlines; it's things like this that really matter.

A note to Jean Karl thanking her for a wonderful weekend will invariably be followed by a note thanking you for coming. A letter inquiring about galleys will be answered promptly. If you do not hear

from Jean Karl in five days she is either "in bed with the doctor," as the saying goes, or she is out of town.

My first contact with Jean was in 1973. I had published with other companies but was searching for a new home. I had heard the name "Jean Karl" as long as I had been writing children's books, and had just completed a new manuscript. Did I dare? She rejected it:

> Dear Ms. Naylor:
>
> Thank you very much for sending us your manuscript *Witch's Sister*. I enjoyed reading it very much and I think your idea is a good one. However, I am afraid you never really convince me that there was any possibility that Judith was a witch. . . .

As my eyes scanned the rest of the letter, I remember thinking, "If I never publish at all with Atheneum, at least I have a signed letter from Jean Karl." And then I reached the last sentence: "If you should ever rewrite your book, I will be glad to take another look." I did, she did, and the book was published.

We prefer letters to phone conversations, and rarely call each other. When we do it is about an artist's sketch or a planned visit—almost never about manuscript revisions. A letter seems more personal somehow, and can be read again and again. Which brings me to the subject of praise.

Jean Karl is much too young to have gone to school with my mother, but I am convinced that, somewhere along the line, they had the same teacher. Praise, in my home, was given out in tiny amounts, like a very rich dessert that could make you sick. About the most horrible thing that could happen to us, other than getting pregnant out of wedlock, was to be infected with conceit.

Jean does not pass out compliments indiscriminately. A typical response to a new manuscript is a three-page letter, single-spaced, that begins: "I have read your manuscript and I like it very much. I think it will be one that children will enjoy. There are, however, some problems." The rest will be comment and criticism, which I rush over quickly, searching for that final paragraph in which, just possibly, she might say something more encouraging. In the last paragraph of her letter regarding my novel, *A String of Chances*, she wrote, "If you can add this one further dimension to the book, it will be a very great book indeed." I came back to that line again and again to sustain me during the revisions.

Once, when my spirits were at low ebb, having received the usual acceptance letter, I wrote to Jean and said, petulantly, that I needed more stroking. Back came a two-page letter filled with compliments. But I blushed when I read it; this wasn't me and it wasn't her. I never

asked for stroking again, and the next manuscript brought the usual two lines of praise. It's enough—not for my ego, perhaps, but for my immortal soul.

But oh, what criticism! Any author will know what I mean when I talk about those "grey" areas of a manuscript—a sentence, a paragraph, a scene that doesn't read entirely right in the final run-through but which we have convinced ourselves no one will notice. Jean notices. Her genius lies in her ability to read a manuscript with a sharp eye for not only the most obscure detail, but for the seemingly intangible things as well. "How old is Maudie?" she writes in one letter. "I assume she is nine. But that would make this 1909, and Teddy Roosevelt [to whom Maudie wrote] would be no longer president. . . ." And in another letter, "The two parts of the story do not really mesh. When they're equally weighted, they interfere with rather than reinforce each other or at best they stand separate and don't quite meet." Not exactly what an author wants to hear, but how very much to the point, and how clear the problem! Or consider this paragraph from Jean's letter regarding *A String of Chances*:

> Somehow you need to make the emotional life of that book come across to the reader more effectively. . . . How this is done is not easy to communicate. Different writers do it in different ways. But mostly the secret lies, I think, in choice of words and even more in patterns of words and cadences of expression. It is a subliminal sort of approach that catches at the reader without his knowing it. It also lies in making the reader totally a part of the scene.

Not only does Jean have a keen sense of the unity, or lack of it, in a manuscript, but she senses the need for wholeness in an author as well. One of the things I appreciate most is her willingness to let me try new things, to proceed with a book that may not turn out to be my best, but is on a theme important to me. She understands that sometimes a better book cannot be written until the author first gets another out of her system, and she takes that chance. And this says a lot about Jean as a person. I have never once heard her say an unkind word about someone else. She is as accepting of other people's foibles and lifestyles as she is of any character in my books.

Recently at a dinner with Jean and a woman who has accompanied her on some of her travels, I was astounded to learn that my editor, who dresses meticulously, had recently been climbing mountains. "You'd be surprised at all we've done," her friend laughed. "We've had to slide down icy paths that were blocked by cows, we've been chased by bears and Russians. . . ."

No, I don't think I'm surprised at all. Good editors, like the characters in a book, should reveal themselves bit by bit, so that both author and reader want to know more.

Lilian Moore, **An Appreciation of Jean Karl**

One summer day—I think it was in 1972—Jean Karl came to the country to visit my husband, Sam Reavin, and me. It was a blisteringly hot day, so Jean and I walked through the woods to the creek that runs through our land. There we let the icy waters cool our bare feet, and we caught up on our news.

Jean had come to visit and to pick up the manuscript of my book of poems, *Sam's Place*—poems about this very place where I was living. It is always a relief to hand a finished manuscript to your editor, but what I have particularly remembered about that day is that Jean expressed only pleasure at receiving the poems. Not a word about *her* relief at finally getting this long overdue book! It was as if she had always been confident she'd get it, though there were many times when *I* doubted it.

We have known each other for many years, and as I think about it now it seems to me that our relationship has always been a serene one. When Jean was still the children's book editor at Abingdon Press, she published two books of my stories and verses for young readers. We shared a background about the problems of beginning readers, and we communicated easily about the purpose of these books and what we hoped for them.

Then Jean Karl came to Atheneum to start a children's book department. Starting a new line of children's books is always a tremulous time. There is excitement, opportunity. There is hope. There are fears. It seems to me that in those first days at Atheneum, Jean exploded with a new kind of energy. I was impressed then, as I am even now remembering, by her willingness to take chances on books she believed in.

What emerged early on was the quality that has marked her as an editor. Jean believes in and totally respects the creativity of the writers she works with. When you feel that way you don't need to push and pull. It's as if you were able to say to a sculptor, "It's your clay. You mold it. But perhaps you may want to take another look at the line from the right shoulder to the elbow."

When Jean began to publish my books of poems, her support was solid and her patience unbelievable. A frequent comment in her letters was, "I know I will get a good book. Don't worry!" On arid days, this trust came like rain.

I think we did *See My Lovely Poison Ivy* for relaxation. (Jean pounced on the title when she first read the poem "The Witch's Garden.") In these less personal verses, she intervened gently, priming the pump here and there. The dedication is "To Jean Karl." It should also have read, "in appreciation of the fun we had doing this book."

Since Jean had recently become a "special books editor" for Atheneum and is producing a line of Jean Karl books, we have had another typical experience in doing a book together. I am too embarrassed to say how long she waited for the manuscript of *I'll Meet You at the Cucumbers*. Life kept intervening.

But at last a story did go out from the hamlet of Kerhonkson to Wilmington, Delaware, a story of a shy country mouse who takes a daring trip to the city to meet his pen friend Amanda Mouse, and discovers there that he is a poet.

Did Jean's letter of acknowledgment say in any way, "Well, it's about time!"? Of course not. She had been saying, "Don't Worry!" too long. She now expressed her pleasure in the story and made an interesting suggestion. Perhaps Adam had to find out more about what being a poet meant?

Yes, that idea was needed. So I added these lines, especially for Jean.

> "A poet," said Adam as if he were tasting the word.
> "Lots of books on these shelves are books of poems," said Amanda.
> Adam looked around, impressed.
> "There must be lots of poets then," he said.
> Amanda nodded, "Oh, yes, you have company."
> "Do people like poets?" asked Adam.
> "I don't know," said Amanda. "But they need them."
> "Need them?" Adam was puzzled.
> "Yes poets are very helpful."
> Amanda was thoughtful for a moment. Then she said, "I think it's the way poets see things—as if everything were new. Then we read the poems and we feel, 'Yes, that's the way it is.'"

It's a pleasure to be one of the first of the Jean Karl books.

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6 *Poets*

Arnold Adoff

Mary Lou White

"My symbol is the circle," is Arnold Adoff's formulation of his aesthetic view of poetry. The 1988 recipient of the NCTE Excellence in Poetry Award visualizes his writings in circular fashion. "Many times the stories that I feel come back again and make a circle." The theme of one of his early books, *Black Is Brown Is Tan*, which was based on his early 1970s family with two primary-school-age interracial children, is repeated and deepened nine years later in *All the Colors of the Race* in which the poems express the feelings of a teenage girl who deals with her interracial status as one segment of her holistic view of life. Like ever-widening circles, other themes and stories are repeated.

Adoff's life has circular patterns as well. Born in the South Bronx on July 16, 1935, he grew up in a Russian immigrant family that placed high values on his Jewish heritage, music achievement, becoming an American, championing liberal causes, and prizing the roles of women. At eleven he started writing poetry. Unwilling to follow in his father's footsteps as a pharmacist, he studied history at City College of New York and wrote for the college newspaper and literary magazine. His political activism found an outlet there as he worked for the protection of civil liberties on campus. While doing graduate work in American history at Columbia University, he taught social studies in Brownsville. Leaving Columbia before he completed his graduate work in the late 1950s, he incorporated many passions in his life; he continued to write poetry, he became manager for the jazz musician, Charlie Mingus, and he supported himself by teaching in the public schools. During this time he met and married Virginia Hamilton who was a young black writer and musical artist from Ohio trying to make

her breakthrough in New York City. Their early married life was exciting and stimulating; in New York's Greenwich Village they were influenced by painters and musicians; in France and Spain they sought quiet places to develop their writing. Adoff taught in Harlem and on Manhattan's Upper West Side. He became an aficionado of black poetry, combing bookstores for poems published in out-of- print black literary and news magazines. He encouraged his students to write poetry and to listen to the words of published black poets. The time was 1968, the heyday of the civil rights movement, when Adoff published his first anthology, *I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems by Negro Americans*.

In 1969 the Adoffs moved to Yellow Springs, Ohio, with their two young children. They built a contemporary house on the land behind Virginia Hamilton's mother's house, land that had long been a part of the Perry family. In this beautiful tree-shaded village, an incongruity of liberals and artists and intellectuals deep in America's heartland, Adoff began the most productive years of his life.

His historical research training from City College and Columbia University served him well as he worked on six more anthologies. Most of these were collections of black poetry and were received with especially high critical acclaim.

While Adoff was doing research for the anthologies, he continued to write his own poetry. When his daughter Leigh was attending a private, rather progressive school in Yellow Springs in the early 1970s, her primary grade teacher taught from the linguistic reader by Leonard Bloomfield. Adoff relates this incident:

"One day Leigh came home and I was working on a piece of 'experimental' poetry for *Poetry Magazine* in Chicago. She said, 'What are you doing, Daddy?' I said, 'I'm writing a poem, 'Aa, Ba, Ma, Fa.' She said, 'That's funny, that's what I was doing at school; I was reading 'Aa, Ba, Ma, Fa.' I realized then that what I was doing for my peers was suited for the kid who was just beginning to read. This is not just in a phonetic-linguistic sense, but beyond that as a means of getting the kids to infer views of a complex world, to infer visions, and to infer feelings from the simple two-letter syllables." Out of this experience came his first book of original poetry for children, *MA nDA LA*.

Adoff defines his poetry as shaped colloquial speech. Children as young as first and second graders often ask, "Why do you spread your words all over the page?" or "Why do you leave all that space?" Even teachers ask, "How do you shape your words?" "Why do you drop your little s's down?" "Why don't you use apostrophes or

punctuation?" Adoff answers these questions: "I have incorporated the concept of time in my writing by the use of space; the millisecond that it takes the eyes to move forward is an aspect of time. Time is the music or the rhythmic force and that, I think, is a step forward in the medium.

"It doesn't matter if my work has upper or lower case, or capitalization, or punctuation, or not. The structure is the shape. It's shaped form poetry. When I have done my job right, the shape and structure can imply the subject. Sometimes it can give the feel of a first baseman or a catcher or some of the other subjects. If I have done my work right, the block of type and the double stanza breaks and the space between the words are like invisible rubber bands that hold the poem together and pull your eye along."

One of Adoff's early mentors was José Garcia Villa, a Philippine professor at the New School for Social Research in New York. "He really broke through my consciousness. Villa said that the poem lives on the page more than just its arrangement on the page. Philosophically I still maintain this and I give him credit for this.

"Another extraordinary influence was the constructivists, a school of painters and sculptors in the early twentieth century in the Soviet Union and France, who were very concerned with the work that they did with the industrialization that was happening, such as the skyscrapers. I cannot remove some of my work from the shapes of the buildings that I saw when I was a kid and from the shapes of machines—the hard edges and the angles. Structurally, I see letters flushing underneath each other and I see, almost the way a building or a machine is constructed with accurate engineering; otherwise it will collapse. I view the poem as a structure that has to have all the elements precisely in place.

"Jazz was another tremendous influence. I don't know how many lifetimes I spent sitting in clubs. When you work with a particular musician and a particular group you are sitting in the club for four or five or six hours a night each night. Many times you are hearing the same song played over and over again. That is very much like reading something over and over again. After a while, you go beyond the notes into the spaces between the notes. I think it was listening to hundreds of repetitions of particular jazz pieces that gave me a clue to some of the rhythmic things that I do.

"Painters probably influenced me more than writers, painters like Robert Motherwell and, before him, Stuart Davis, who incorporated words into the picture, and artists like the very fine draftsman who did the drawings for John Dos Passos's USA trilogy. I am affected by

the visual Walker Evans photographs from the 1930s, the surrealist painters that I saw in the 1950s and the impressionists as well. From time to time you learn to go inside the color, or you learn to go beyond the color and what is into the absence of color.

"So with words, there are also nonwords, and so it's emptiness and problem solving. The solution, then, is the devising of a system where there is an integration of speech and silence and meaning and music. The synthesis is something you hope is a good poem. The bottom line to all of this is rather complex, compared to 'they're changing the guard at Buckingham Palace.' This should be, because these are complex times, but it's not to take the innocence away from young kids and it's not to take that clear vision or simplicity away. It's just to add another element."

The theoretical underpinnings of Adoff's art are carefully developed. "The circle is the system that I use and the components of this system are *balance, integration,* and *utility.* I strive for the *balance* of six elements in my work: the semantics or meaning of the writing, the rhythmic line of force, the poetic form, the poetic prose technique, fantasy and realism. It's really a balancing act like that of a juggler and many of the times only a few of those elements are in the work."

The component of *integration* is what led Adoff to write for young people. A struggling poet in the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was always politically active and trying to make statements. He viewed his anthologies as attempts to effect change. "Integration is not only the racial or the gender or the class aspects. It's the societal role. Integration of my work *into* the lives of the kids and integration of the writer *into* the society is what I try to do. And where would my energies go if not integrated into the next generation which could be influenced?"

The third component, *utility,* is based on the *uses* of art: self-realization, critical thinking, view of the world, view of wonder. "I call this 'cognitive-imaginative' where you can view something that is imaginative and build a better understanding of reality through an understanding of fantasy. I learned that from C. S. Lewis, the author of the Narnia series when we read those books to Leigh and Jaime. They learned about the *human* species and our time from Aslan the Lion and all those people then. It was a wonderful lesson for me."

Although Adoff is frequently compared with e.e. cummings in reviews, the similarity is in the absence of punctuation, not the deeper use of form. Adoff is on the cutting edge of literary experimentation with form in children's writing. In both prose and poetry, a growing

number of children's authors are trying to make the typographical placement add visual impact to the meaning of the statement.

Another unique feature of Adoff's work is his technique of creating a series of poems within a book that acts as a prose work yet is different from both a single narrative poem or a prose story. Read together, the individual poems tell a story. They are akin to verses of a conventional poem or chapters of a story. The short form of the poem tells the story with greater impact because of its brevity. It can be reread for meaning, rhythm and structure more readily than a prose narrative. Adoff often links the poems by having the last work of one poem fit with the first word of the next one. Each poem can stand alone but read in sequence they afford still another interpretation.

Teaching is one aspect of Adoff's life that is part of the circle. He keeps coming back to teaching. During the nearly twenty years in Yellow Springs he did a great deal of lecturing in school settings, traversing the country on the lecture circuit. Not only does he lecture to groups of children, he works with children's writing, often in connection with the local Young Authors programs. He has useful ideas about how to have children develop their poetry writing.

"Take a Karla Kuskin, a Shel Silverstein, or a Myra Cohn Livingston and lay them out and see the poet's approach. It is the process of comparing and critical thinking that they will be using over and over again.

"I care a great deal about compression. It's important when I work with kids that I never leave a fifth or sixth grade without talking about 'implication' and 'inference.' I talk about how you can expand but more often than not, I am cutting away and cutting away. One of the elements of structure is to require readers to participate more actively. If you require inference and if you require readers to grasp an implication, then sometimes that should be required by something that is missing rather than by something that is there hitting them over the head.

"Typing is important for young writers so that they can shape their poems closer to how the poem will look in print (even if they never publish) rather than to have the number of words of a line determined by how big or small you write freehand.

"When I am drafting a poem, I visualize myself surfing—only I don't surf, but I'm kind of doing so on a word processor or on a sheet of paper. That's the way kids should be gliding into the process of revision—not sweating and grinding, attempting to find a word that rhymes at the end of a line that could be in any way close to what

they *really* wanted to say. Why create more locks? Why create more prisons? Why not open up a few walls?"

In 1986 the Adoffs were invited to the positions of Distinguished Visiting Professors at Queens College in New York. They worked with graduate students in education and held these positions for two years. In the 1988–89 academic year Adoff is continuing the position at Queens College with Nicholasa Mohr while Virginia Hamilton is serving in a similar position at The Ohio State University.

"We're writers connecting with the public schools and the College of Education, which is very rare. I don't know too many situations like this where there are 'writers in residence' who actually do hands-on work with *teachers*. We're working with graduate students studying for their masters in education, not for masters of fine arts in creative writing! We give assignments that deal with learning to write and revise. For example, Virginia might do a fairy tale while I have them write journal entries and the realistic and fantasy elements in their lives.

Another aspect of teaching is being pursued by Adoff. He is currently the poetry consultant for Holt, Rinehart and Winston's new literature series. When he suggests poems that might be used in the textbooks he includes a page of insights about each poetic selection to be used by the editorial staff who write questions or background information for teachers' use.

During Adoff's lectures he is often asked to read his poetry aloud. He does this very well and often brings a wider interpretation to the listener. For a person who stresses the visual image of the poem there are some inconsistencies in the act of oral poetry reading. Adoff resolves the philosophical problem in a practical way.

"If you read the poem aloud that is the *reading* of the poem. That is *not* the poem. But if art is utilitarian, if I am a teacher as well as a poet, then other teachers must be given ways of using my work. Practically, I still go out as often as I can and do whatever I can to increase the *use* of poetry. If that includes the reading of poetry out loud, then it's the coin that I spend to use my energies developing something although I think in the end it really subverts one of the elements of the art form. Everybody has to pay something for what they believe in and that is the coin that I have used to pay for some kid's heart and soul, a kid who may not hear the rhythmic element of a work unless he or she hears it read aloud."

Many of the themes of Adoff's books of original poetry reflect his young family and their interests. Five books deal with ethnic themes. Of those, three concern children in an interracial setting and are based

on Adoff's family: *Black Is Brown Is Tan, All the Colors of the Race* and *Big Sister Tells Me that I'm Black. Where Wild Willie* is about a black child and includes the syntax of black dialect. *MA nDA LA* was not written as a poem of a black family; it is simply a tonal poem. The illustrations in an African setting create the ethnic theme. Five of his books are on childhood experiences of growing up: family warmth, *Make a Circle, Keep Us In*; sibling rivalry/love, *Today We Are Brother and Sister*, which is set in the island off Puerto Rico where the Adoffs have a vacation home; and sports, *i am the running girl, Outside Inside Poems*, and *Sports Pages*. Four books are on themes of nature: *Tornado!, Under the Early Morning Trees, Friend Dog*, and *Birds*. Two books are solely humorous: *Eats Poems* and *The Cabbages Are Chasing the Rabbits*.

Now that the two Adoff children are in their early twenties and both pursuing medical careers, the question arises as to where Adoff can turn for themes.

"I get back tremendous amounts when I travel around the country. You learn about what American culture is when you see what the kids are doing and how they're playing ball and what they're saying and all the different white Englishes as well as the black Englishes. I could spend several lifetimes and not really do it all. I have a wealth of material from my own youngsters and from their friends when they were teenagers. I keep up with young children and I 'exploit' my own self and my own immaturity. I refuse to grow up. I can philosophize about an aesthetic but I can be as twelve as any twelve-year-old."

Significant honors have been bestowed on Adoff's work. Inclusion on the American Library Association's Notable Children's Books list has been awarded to three poetry books and five anthologies. Several books have been listed on *School Library Journal's* Best Books of the Year list. Other honors have been given to several of his poetry books and anthologies.

Adoff's most recent book of poetry, *Greens: Poems* is typical of the very attractive picture book form in which his books are published.

"It's an added dimension, especially for a poet such as myself, for whom the visual element is so important, to have my work illustrated. I have almost always been thrilled with the art and the artists and they have almost always *added* to my work. The artists are all so good. Sadly, then they learn 'how to write' and do their own books.

"I demand a big say-so. I am very difficult to work with sometimes. When that poem goes from the manuscript page to being printed, so many times there is a problem because of width or values of typeface. Many of my works have not been published precisely the way they were intended to be. Now I have publishers who have the people

who run the computer-operated typesetting machines at the printers call me from the shops to set up a spacing system so that they can program their machines to get my form right and also to get right the amount of spaces between the letters and between the words. I cause publishers to spend more money than they would, even on most other poetry. But in the end, those that care are those who really feel it."

In the true style of the poet, Adoff does not reveal all about his life. There is a large chunk of autobiographical material about the young Jewish boy growing up in the South Bronx which has not come into print. It is part of his writing that has been brewing for many years. In the future readers will very likely read more about that young man's life.

There are other future projects. The fall of 1988 will bring forth *Flamboyan*, a prose poem form quite new to Adoff with a setting inspired by the Puerto Rican home. Another anthology is in the works, this time an international collection of black poetry worldwide.

Adoff visualizes more than his poetry as a circular symbol. He places the totality of his life in that configuration. "In the end, if I'm successful in my poetry, the poem on the page is a synthesis of my aesthetics and my personal life and mental state and my 'craft and sullen art' as Dylan Thomas said, and my control of technique and all of those other elements that I care about. If I am successful, then my life is a synthesis of being a poet and a teacher and a *participant*. So that's a step beyond my mentors and beyond many artists who function in our society. And that would be a step forward."

A Chronological Bibliography

Poetry Anthologies Compiled by Arnold Adoff

I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems by Negro Americans. Macmillan, 1968.
City in All Directions: An Anthology of Modern Poems. Macmillan, 1969.
Black Out Loud: An Anthology of Modern Poems by Black Americans. Macmillan, 1970.
It Is the Poem Singing Into Your Eyes: An Anthology of New Young Poets. Harper, 1971.
My Black Me: A Beginning Book of Black Poetry. Dutton, 1974.
Celebrations: A New Anthology of Black American Poetry. Follett, 1977.

Poetry Written by Arnold Adoff

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Make a Circle, Keep Us In: Poems for a Good Day. Delacorte, 1975.
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Under the Early Morning Trees. Dutton, 1978.
Eats: Poems. Lathrop, 1979.
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Greens: Poems. Lothrop, 1988.

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Black on Black: Commentaries by Negro Americans. Macmillan, 1968.
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Malcolm X. Crowell, 1970.

[Language Arts 65, no. 6 (1988): 584–91]

Recent Publications

1990 *Sports Pages*
1990 *Hard to Be Six*
1989 *Chocolate Dreams*
1988 *Flamboyan*

7 *Poets*

Byrd Baylor

Bette Bosma

"I am a writer,"[1] says Byrd Baylor, a southwest Arizona author, "and each morning, as I go out my door with my backpack, I read the sign that I wrote to myself and tacked on the door: 'All the other writers are sitting at their desks. Where are you going?'"

Walking in the desert is essential for her writing, Byrd relates. "I don't have to go anywhere to find out about things. It's all right here. I pick up stuff like bits of prehistoric pottery, pretty stones . . . I do things that are fun like following the tracks of a coyote or maybe a packrat. I'm writing more and more about desert animals, so I write things in my notebook about what I see." Byrd Baylor feels that living close to animals is one way of keeping in touch with natural forces. She is happy living in the desert, and being part of it. "I have a fondness for a kind of country that is rough and wild and hard to get along with, so that it takes strength to make it there. I like the animals that live there."

With the help of friends, Byrd has built her own adobe house, on her property less than ten miles from the Mexican border. "It was really fun to mix clay and straw, and slowly build up the earthen walls. It's beautiful because it is made from earth." It even has an earthen floor which she cools in the summer by wetting it down—"nature's air conditioning," she explains. Because the walls went up slowly, she was able to place the windows right where they would make the best frames for the clouds and the mountains.

[1] All quotations from Byrd Baylor are taken from two speeches given at a Young Author Festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a taped interview on May 3, 1986.

In the middle of this house she has a tree. Why a tree? "I always wanted a tree in my house. I have to see the sun come up every morning so that I can start my day the right way. I built a loft high enough so that I can see the sun come up over the mountains." She really wanted a live tree, but had to settle for a dead black walnut. A friend notched steps with a hatchet. Now, whenever Byrd is home, she can start the day by walking up the tree to view the sunrise.

Byrd was born in San Antonio, Texas, and her fondest memories are of visits to a family ranch in west Texas. Her father worked in small gold mines in the southwest area, and they moved frequently. She counted west Texas, Sonora, New Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona, as home, before she found her special place in the southwestern Arizona desert. "You live where your heart tells you to be. For me, that is the desert."

Children often ask Byrd Baylor if she is an Indian, perhaps because of her obvious kinship with the environment. "Even the Indians ask that. Whatever tribe I am with, they place me in another tribe." My impression while talking with her was that she is pleased that the Indians think of her as one of them. She admires their respect for the environment and their ability to adapt to the harsh land and climate. Byrd lives in harmony with her environment and sees the uniqueness and beauty of each element of nature that she observes. She shares these observations in her books.

"I started writing in the third grade. I made up my mind then to be a writer, but I didn't tell anybody. I just told myself." Byrd kept her writing in a cigar box, cutting paper to fit, and adding story after story. She didn't think about illustrations for the stories, because all the pictures were in her head. Now, she marvels at the way Peter Parnall shares her impressions of the desert and is able to capture the feeling of her books through his bold lines and brilliant colors. As a result of this successful collaboration, three books have been named Caldecott Honor Books and four books have received ALA Notable Book awards.

Parnall has illustrated nine of her books, including the latest one published in 1986, *I'm In Charge of Celebrations*. When she saw the illustrations for the first time in the finished copy, she was delighted with them. She felt that he had understood exactly what her feelings were in choosing those particular celebrations. "I have one hundred and eight celebrations," Byrd reported. "All my celebrations are private things. The feeling is meant to be that you can celebrate anything you want to celebrate. They are private and don't have to appear to

anybody except you. I celebrate things like coyote day, green cloud day, or dust devil day."

When Byrd begins writing a book, she does not think about anyone reading it, or what age of person would be interested in it. When she was young, Byrd thought that if she lived in a more exciting place like Europe she would be able to write more exciting stories. Now she thinks that whatever she does in her life is exciting. "If I want to write about a rock, a coyote, or a lizard—that's wonderful. I write about all the things that I truly love myself. The only thing I plan for sure in a book is the feeling that I want the book to have."

After she has collected all the notes and observations she needs and is ready to stay at her desk to write, she says that finding the right words is the hardest part. "When I finish a book, it probably has about ten words that I just love—the rest of them just hold those words together." She writes her books in poetic form with the words carefully chosen for each line. The visual effect forms a unity with the illustrations and portrays the mood which she sets in her story.

Her first book was about a prairie dog town, and was titled *Amigo*. It was published by Macmillan in 1963, and in 1986 is being published in Japan with the original drawings by Garth Williams. Byrd recalls that this book was a result of a summer when she was trying to learn how to make tortillas: "My tortillas were awful. Everyday, I would try again, and no one would eat them, so my son and I would tear them up and take them out to the prairie dog town. The prairie dogs loved them. One day we went out there and right on this rock there were beautiful bluejay feathers. We knew the prairie dogs put them there as a present for us. Later they left beautiful little stones. The book came from that experience. Finally, after sending the book out to many, many publishers, I received a letter saying that they loved my book and were going to publish it even though they didn't know what prairie dogs were."

Byrd can tell a unique story about each book she has written. *I Am a Hunter of Fossils* was written on the fossil hunting site. "I love fossils," says Byrd. "I love things that take me back to the beginning of life. I like to feel that I'm in a chain of life. I go around touching trees and fossils and pick up pottery pieces in the desert and think about the hands that held them before I did." But when she came to the middle of the book, she felt that she was doing a terrible job, so she packed up the fossils, got in the car and went back to west Texas where she did her fossil hunting. She sat on a rock at the actual site and finished the book.

The Best Town in the World was the result of hearing her father

telling over and over how perfect was the town in which he grew up. The people were nicer, the houses were made better, and there were such wonderful cooks! This story appeared first in *McCall's* magazine, and Byrd received many letters from older people who were sure that they could identify the town. Byrd shared *The Best Town in the World* with children in a writing workshop in an elementary school. She told them some of the things she left out of the book, and they scattered to write their own ideas about a best town. Then all the authors shared their stories, and talked about the importance of their surroundings.

Byrd Baylor has worked with school children from Anchorage, Alaska, to Midland, Michigan. "Many schools are bringing people in to talk about writing. I think it's more than just seeing a person who writes books: it's turning kids on to ideas. I see my work with children as encouragement to help them realize that they too, have ideas and that's all they need to write. There is a clear difference between writing as a creative endeavor and writing on an assigned topic. We should know what the difference is, and be in touch with what the children do."

Byrd feels that children should have time to look around them and see the important things. "I hope when children read my books that their eyes are a little more open to the world around them. It's so wonderful. That's not the reason I write, but I do hope that comes from my writing."

Books by Byrd Baylor

And It Is Still That Way. N.Y.: Chas. Scribner Sons, 1976.
Before You Came This Way. Illus. by Tom Bahti. N.Y.: Dutton, 1969.
The Best Town in The World. Illus. by Ron Himler. N.Y.: Chas. Scribner Sons, 1983.
Coyote Cry. Illus. by Symeon Shimin. N.Y.: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1972.
The Desert Is Theirs. Illus. by Peter Parnall. N.Y.: Chas. Scribner Sons, 1975. New York: Atheneum, 1975. Caldecott Honor Book. ALA Notable Book. NY Academy of Science Honor Book.
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I'm in Charge of Celebrations. Illus. by Peter Parnall, 1986.
If You Are a Hunter of Fossils. Illus. by Peter Parnall. N.Y.: Atheneum, 1984. N.Y.: Chas. Scribner Sons, 1980. Outstanding Science Trade Book.
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[Language Arts *64, no. 3 (1987): 315-18*]

Recent Publications

1989 *Amigo*

8 *Poets*

Lilian Moore

Joan I. Glazer

"Poems should be like fireworks, packed carefully and artfully, ready to explode with unpredictable effects," says Lilian Moore, the 1985 recipient of the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. "When people asked Robert Frost—as they did by the hundreds—what he meant by 'But I have promises to keep/ And miles to go before I sleep/ And miles to go before I sleep,' he always turned the question aside with a joke. Maybe he couldn't answer it, and maybe he was glad that the lines exploded in so many different colors in so many people's minds."

Lilian Moore's poems have exploded in the minds of children and adults alike, causing them to visualize wind "wrinkling" the water, or sense something, "slinkety-sly," coming down the stairs. Her works of poetry include *I Feel the Same Way, I Thought I Heard the City, Sam's Place, See My Lovely Poison Ivy, Think of Shadows,* and *Something New Begins*. She has also authored many picture books and compiled several collections of poems for children.

She was living in New York when her first book of poems was published, but laughs when the idea of her being a "city person" is questioned. "I started out with a flower pot, then I had a window box, then I had a back yard, then I came here. So I've always wanted things that grow, and the light of the sky in the country." "Here" is a farm in Kerhonkson, New York, where she and her husband, Sam Reavin, live, and which is the setting for *Sam's Place*. It was also the setting for this interview. The visitor can step out the back door to where deer approached the house, see the chestnut tree and what now remains of the old apple orchard, look across the pond, see those

aspects of nature which were observed so carefully and written about so lovingly.

What does Ms. Moore see as the outstanding characteristic of her work? "I try to tell the truth." It is the truth of accurate observations, without sentimentality. "The equivalent of doing research for a book when you're writing about a willow, let's say, as I did in 'Yellow Willow,' is to live with that willow the whole year round. I watched those willows, and they're all kinds of yellow—spring yellow, summer yellow-green. But it took me some time to realize that they were yellow all through the winter too, that those "brassy boughs" do stay yellow. Now, Sam was a terrific help, because I was always asking questions about how things grew, how the land changed, checking to see if I was precise—telling the truth."

Does she see any of her writing as being fantasy, or is it all the real world and how she perceives it? "Well, this is a poem of mine I happen to like," she responds. "Is this real or is it fantasy?"

Mural on Second Avenue

Someone
stood here
tall on a ladder,
dreaming
to the slap of a
wet brush,

painting
on the blank
unwindowed wall of
this old house.

Now the wall is a
field of wild
grass,
bending to a wind.

A unicorn's grazing there
beside a zebra.

A giraffe is nibbling a
tree top
and in a sky of eye-blinking
blue

A horse is flying.
All
right at home in the
neighborhood.[1]

[1] Reprinted with permission. From *Something New Begins*. Atheneum, 1982.

She continues. "One day, when I walked down Second Avenue, I saw a wall which had been painted. And what was on it was a pond with a duck on it, and a tree. I was very much taken with the idea that in the city somebody wanted to paint this kind of dream. When I tried to write a poem that told exactly what I saw, it was klunky. It didn't work. I didn't capture what I thought the painter felt or what I felt when I saw the wall. A flying horse and a unicorn were necessary. I don't know whether that answers your question or not. To get the truth of how I felt, and the truth of what I saw, I had to have some magic, the same magic that person had while painting what to me was a dead duck."

The "truth of how I felt" permeates the writing of Ms. Moore. Some poems, such as "Mural on Second Avenue" and the ones in *Sam's Place*, reflect her experiences as an adult. Others, such as many of those in *I Feel the Same Way*, recall memories of her childhood. She describes the way she always felt when looking at the sea, her feeling in the fog as if it were wrapping her up, her memories of walking to and from school in the third grade on days so cold that she blew "dragon smoke" with her breath. When a poem is completed, she has a different feeling about the subject. "Once I have the poem done, I don't feel the same intensity." Is that a disappointment? "Oh, no. There are other ways of looking."

"When I'm writing a poem," Ms. Moore says, "I feel as if I'm working all the time. I think I wrote 'Until I Saw the Sea' on the subway on the way to work." She concentrates on the imagery she's seeking and on the play of words—"I like the *echo* of words more than rhyme"—until she has the poem under control. "I once wrote a poem while at the dentist's. I withdrew completely into myself, with a real absorption, trying to solve a problem. Much testing and revising seems to be done in my head when I'm working on a poem.

"As I'm working on a version I've done, I read the poem to myself but not aloud. I hear it. I hear everything that's wrong with a line inside my head. You know the most autobiographical poem I ever wrote? That's a little lighthearted one in *See My Lovely Poison Ivy*. It's very apt.

I Left My Head

I left my head
somewhere
today.
Put it down for
just
a minute.

Under the
table?
On a chair?
Wish I were
able
to say
where.
Everything I need
is
in it![2]

That's my head! I could never use a computer, but don't tell anybody that. I love polishing. I can do a line twenty-five times trying to get it right. I edit my own things constantly.

"I believe that editing is a kind of sculpture. If there's a line with a bump in it and you have a sense of form, you smooth it and give it shape. When I was an editor, I was able to help people do that with their manuscripts. I was able to do that with my own stories. And possibly that's what happens with my poetry.

"Do you know who helps the most?" she asks. "Other poets. When I need a response, I turn to my friends—Judith Thurman, or Eve Merriam. I would ask Valerie Worth if she lived closer. We know each other only through letters. Poets help each other wonderfully. For instance, we'd been through a severe dry spell here and the line came to me, 'Roots have forgotten the taste of rain.' I told a poet friend, 'I'm really stuck on this line. I can't go forward.' She said, 'Why don't you back into it?' I said, 'Of course!' And that's what I did, backed into it. It worked as the last line of 'Dry Spell.' That's how poets help one another—by listening seriously and taking seriously the problems in structuring a poem." It is on this level that Ms. Moore responds to the poetry of her son Jonathan, a published adult poet. Sharing a poem of his about the growth, both plant and animal, in the pond, she says, "It speaks to me, not as son to mother, but as poet to poet."

Ms. Moore has been a teacher and a reading specialist, and was the editor at Scholastic who established the Arrow Book Club. As a child she was a voracious reader. She would go to the library, leave with an armful of books, and have read two of them before she got home. She simply assumed that she would be a writer when she grew up, and often created stories which she would tell to friends. With utter confidence in the loyalty of her audience, she would stop midway through the tale and announce that it was "to be continued tomorrow."

When her son was young, she wrote many light verses. "Feet that

[2] Reprinted with permission. From *See My Lovely Poison Ivy*. Atheneum, 1975.

wear shoes can walk and have fun/ Feet that wear sneakers want only to run," was inspired by her three year old with his first pair of sneakers. Jean Karl suggested that she collect some of the verses for a book. When she started writing the book, she found herself tapping her own childhood memories, rather than writing exclusively about the experiences of her son or other children whom she had observed.

She describes herself as being conscious of the limited experience of children and wanting her poetry to be accessible. However, if a poem works, she does not "censor" it, hoping that someone will help the child to "take in" the poem, or that the poem may become a "deposit" that the child can draw upon. She suggests that teachers not "bear down too hard" on a poem. They should begin with children's experience, then present the poem. Looking at "Recess" from *Think of Shadows*, Ms. Moore says she believes that children who have observed their own shadows on the playground can then be encouraged to talk about "scribbling their shadows on the school yard," and can deal with such figurative language as "till a cloud moving across the morning sun wipes out all scribbles like a giant eraser." She says ruefully that her poem "Telling Time" may be becoming old-fashioned, and an unfamiliar experience, for children with digital watches. They may not know what was meant when she wrote that "time . . . ticks, whispers, rings."

Ms. Moore does see her work evolving. Talking again of *Think of Shadows*, she comments, "I decided that although this book was aimed for the young school child, whatever I put in it, whatever idea or language or imagery I needed, I was going to include, not fight. To me a poem is like a balloon on a string. What you get out of it depends on how tall you are, how long the string is. Something there for everyone!"

The need to make books and poetry available to children has motivated many of Ms. Moore's activities. She was delighted with her task at Scholastic of setting up a paperback book club, for she was able to select good books and bring them to children inexpensively. "The whole process of learning to read comes from reading. After all, you can't learn to swim in a bathtub." Her own picture books have been widely translated, particularly the Little Raccoon books.

The most recent request for publication rights, however, has been refused. Ms. Moore's letter to the South African publisher concluded with a succinct statement of her reasons for refusal: "It has always been a source of deepest pleasure to me to know how much children have loved these books. Some day, when apartheid is only a terrible

memory, when all children can freely have access to these books, I should be proud and happy to have you publish them."

The Russian translations of the Little Raccoon books sold over 375,000 copies. In 1967, when Ms. Moore was in the Soviet Union, she made a special request of the editors she met. What she really wanted was to meet Kornei Chukovsky, the noted Russian author, editor, translator, and critic. As well as writing for children himself, he had observed and recorded young children's own uses of language. Ms. Moore had read his book, *From Two to Five*, and it spoke to her own interest in the speech and expressions of children. "To hear young children as they explore experiences—everything being observed and responded to for the first time—well, it's like the morning of the world," she marvels. The editors arranged a visit, and she was driven to Peredelkino to meet Chukovsky. He was then eighty-five years old, "a tall, vital, handsome man with a mane of white hair." She told him about her son, who when quite young, looked at the new moon and cried out, "Look! The moon is broke!" Chukovsky was going to write it down, but there was no need for that. It was already in his book—a young Russian child had said the same thing.

Then he turned to her and said that he'd been told she wrote poetry for children. "Tell me one."

After what she describes as feeling like a child being asked to recite, and after recovering from a "moment of total amnesia," she said this poem for him.

Until I Saw the Sea

Until I saw the sea
I did not know
that wind
could wrinkle water so.

I never knew
that sun
could splinter a whole sea of blue.

Nor
did I know before
a sea breathes in and out
upon a shore.[1]

"Beautiful," he said, and kissed her on the cheek.

The NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children is our kiss on Lilian Moore's cheek, and as we read her poetry, we too say, "Beautiful!"

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[1] Reprinted with permission. From *I Feel the Same Way*. Atheneum, 1967.

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I Thought I Heard the City. Atheneum, 1969.
Sam's Place. Atheneum, 1973.
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See My Lovely Poison Ivy. Atheneum, 1975.
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Something New Begins. Atheneum, 1982.

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To See the World Afresh (with Judith Thurman). Atheneum, 1974.
Go With the Poem. McGraw, 1979. To Accompany Macmillan, Series r Reading Program, 1975.
A Poem Can Say It
Poem Time is Now
You Look, Too
Poets Notice Everything
Poets Go Wishing
Each in a Different Voice

Selected Stories by Lilian Moore

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The Terrible Mr. Twitmeyer. (with Leone Adelson) Random, 1952.
The Snake That Went to School. Random, 1957.
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Little Raccoon and the Thing in the Pool. McGraw, 1963.
Papa Albert. Atheneum, 1964.
The Magic Spectacles. Parents, 1965.
Just Right. Parents, 1968.
Junk Day on Juniper Street. Parents, 1969.
Little Raccoon and the Outside World. McGraw, 1970.
Little Raccoon and No Trouble at All. McGraw, 1972.
Hooray for Me! (with Remy Charlip). Parents, 1975.

[Language Arts 62, no. 6 (1985): 647–52]

Recent Publications

1988 *I'll Meet You at the Cucumbers*
1988 *Junk Day on Easy Street and Other Easy-to-Read Stories*
1985 *The Magic Spectacles and Other Easy-to-Read Stories* (With Arnold Lobel)

9 *Folklorists*

Alvin Schwartz

Sylvia M. Vardell

Who has done for folklore for children in the United States what the Grimm brothers did in Germany, Perrault did in France, and Joseph Jacobs did in England? Alvin Schwartz, that's who! Schwartz, himself, would call this comparison a "whopper," "gally flopper," or a "tall tale," but many critics, teachers, and readers of all ages are finding his collections of tongue twisters, jokes, riddles, rhymes, scary stories, tall tales, wordplay, conundrums, noodle tales, puns, superstitions, secret languages, nonsense, memoirs, wisecracks, and outright lies rich and delightful sources of language and literature. His work is unique and distinctive in the field of children's literature, in the breadth of types and topics covered, as well as in the variety of purposes and audiences which might be appropriate. Each book is thoroughly and meticulously researched, with background notes and sources cited and complete bibliographies included. Together, these collections represent an impressive gathering of folklore for children which Alvin Schwartz characterizes as "a living tradition . . . the experience of the human race . . . something remarkable and continuous" (Schwartz 1977).

Schwartz has been recognized by School Library Journal, the American Library Association, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Council for the Social Studies. In the *New York Times Book Review*, William Cole claimed Schwartz "elevated foolishness to a form of art." *Horn Book* (February 1984) said, "If the current generation grows up with a knowledge of traditional humor, it may well be because of Alvin Schwartz's many volumes of humorous American folklore." His work

has been adapted to audio cassette form by Caedmon and Listening Library and supplemented with teacher's guides by Lippincott Publishing Company.

This New York native, born April 25, 1927, has been writing for children since 1966 (with *The Night Workers*), and collecting folklore since the very successful *Tongue Twisters* appeared in 1972. His background also includes degrees from Colby College and Northwestern University, extensive experience as a journalist and editor, and service in the U.S. Navy in World War II. He is the son of a taxi driver, married to an educator, and the father of four grown children.

Schwartz's extensive interviewing and rigorous research has culminated in over three dozen works. His collections of folklore are wonderful teaching tools; as a source of oral-based literature, they are suitable for children of all ages. In the following interview, which took place at the NCTE convention in Philadelphia (November 1985), Schwartz discusses openly his approach to writing and research, his own evolution as an author, and his views on humor, children, and works in progress.

SV: Can you briefly describe the process that you go through in a typical book or if you have several projects going on at one time?

AS: I overlap my work—sometimes I'm working on three things at once, and I do that for practical reasons. One of the reasons is that I might "block" or simply become very bored with what I am doing if I work with it too intensively. Then I will move to something else, and in the process, my mind clears when it comes to the first project. Basically, what I do with every book, is learn everything I can about the genre. This will involve a lot of reading and scholarly books and journals and sometimes discussions and scholarly folklorists. I do a lot of my work at Firestone Library at Princeton University. I live about a half mile from there, and this is one of the reasons we live in Princeton. It's really a fine library. In the process of accumulating everything on a subject, I begin setting aside things that I particularly like. What's interesting is that eventually patterns emerge. What I'm looking for is not only what I like, but things that typify the genre. So there is a range of material and there always will be. In working with "scary story" material, one finds five or six or seven typologies. I was not aware of this with *Scary Stories* until I began searching the material and putting it together. Sometimes I will go so far as to study the structure of an item to see how it works, because this is important in making selections and it's also interesting to people to understand this, I think.

Then having done the research, I begin putting the book together. If there is writing involved, then that comes next. Generally, one of the short books, an "I Can Read" book, takes

me six months to do, about half the time in research and half the time in writing. The writing is very important to me. Everything I write is read aloud three or four times in the bathroom because the acoustics are so good. I'm listening to the way the sounds link up and work together, so I will lock myself in the bathroom and read the book aloud and put big red circles around those things that are not working in terms of sounds. Since a lot of this material is going to be *told*, the sounds are important. But, what I'm also after here, when I'm dealing with tales, are stripped down tales—right down to the essentials, because traditionally, storytellers will take such a tale and embellish it themselves. I want them to be able to do this. Now I've discovered that professional storytellers are using my stuff. And librarians use it in this way, I hope. They should be. After all, every time you sing a folksong, it changes. That's essentially what I do.

The older books take a long time. They generally take a year or more. A book I did called *Fat Man in a Fur Coat and Other Bear Stories* was an experiment. I began, for the first time, using mixed media. I was using folktales and some poetry, including an Abraham Lincoln poem. I used some journalism—I developed the story on the air force research using bears. There is some historical material in the book and there's hyperbole and so on. The idea was to use all of these media to reflect the nature and texture of the varied relationships, fanciful and otherwise, that we have with bears.

SV: Sort of a bear anthology?

AS: More of a social history, I thought. That sounds grandiose, but that was what I had in the back of my mind. Sometimes it's all very easy. When I did *The Cat's Elbow and Other Secret Languages*, I was brash enough to sign a contract without really looking to see what there was. I assumed, well, there just had to be stuff, and I could just find it. I became quite nervous after three months because I was finding very little. And then one day I was on C Floor of Firestone Library, staring at a very brief reference to secret languages in the *New York Folklore Journal* which referred me to a science magazine from 1890, which referred me to a defunct German folklore publication, which was published in the 1890s! The editor had an interest in secret languages, and he had made periodic requests of his readers for secret languages they knew. There was a trove of material there. I found all that in one morning! So I hired some graduate students who translated this stuff from the Old Norse and Swahili and Chinese and so forth. I think there are nine or ten of these secret languages which ended up in the book, including the title "The Cat's Elbow." I discovered on an airplane ride what it actually meant. It's from the German. I was riding out to Sacramento, and the man sitting next to me taught German literature at Wake Forest University. He said, "What are you working on?" And I told him. He said, "You know what that means? The 'cat's elbow' means the funny bone." The Germans refer to the funny bone as "the cat's elbow."

So when I got off the plane I called my editor in New York. They were putting the book together, and we worked it into the text.

SV: Of course, everyone always wants to know what got you interested in folklore, particularly in writing and collecting?

AS: So far as the writing is concerned, there is a practical matter here as well as a matter of interest. When I began writing kids' books, they were concerned basically with the kinds of things that fascinated me as a journalist. This was in the 1960s and I initially was concerned with social issues and American institutions and things of that sort. I did books ranging from how public opinion functioned and formed to a book on the labor movement and how it functioned. The market for them was really supported by the funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. When that funding began to die in the early 1970s, I realized that this was not a practical avenue. I liked to do these books, but I was not going to support myself and have the freedom that I had gained, if I continued to write them, at least as many.

Well, I've always been interested in wordplay. I decided I was going to pursue this. I did a book of tongue twisters and in the process of collecting this material (being a journalist, I naturally decided to find some expert resources), I determined who the President of the American Folklore Society was and I called him up. He happened to be in the folklore department at the University of Pennsylvania, actually, and I've used that department ever since as a resource. He has followed my work and been very helpful. Many folklorists across the country have also been cooperative. That's what happened. The first book was a national bestseller. My feeling was, my goodness, if this is the response, I certainly must pursue this! And that's what happened.

I think there have been, thus far, including the "I Can Read" material, probably nineteen or twenty collections. Although they deal with a range of subjects, basically there are two or three kinds of books involved. One is a kind of distillation of all the material associated with a particular genre—riddles, jests, poetry—which provides, basically, a sense of the genre, what the genre is. Second, when I'm dealing with tales, often I try for a synthesis of the variants of basic motifs. In one instance, I might stack twenty or thirty variants of a tale that I like and create my own version. In other cases where there are motifs, but there really aren't any decent versions, I will construct my own, using the traditional construct.

SV: What kinds of criteria do you keep in mind when you put those things together and choose the best for children? Is there anything specific that guides you?

AS: No, no, no—just gut, really—all those books contain things that I like, and I think I have fairly good taste. I don't know why, but what I like kids apparently respond to also. In the early days—the *Tomfoolery* material and the material in *Witcracks* and so on, and belief material such as *Cross Your Fingers*—I would try

the stuff on my kids or I'd ask them questions about how they used riddling or trickery. The one criterion that I do use now for the material for younger children is asking myself "Do they know enough—have they had enough experience to understand this, and what kind of an effect will it have on them?" So, I do do that. But basically again, it's a question of whether I like it or not.

SV: That's pretty basic. You mentioned the "I Can Read" books. How did you get involved in those?

AS: That was my agent's idea, actually. And it was a good idea. There's a very large market there, and I've discovered something which is more important than that in many ways, and that is—it's a wonderful audience. I just love working with the younger children. They are very responsive. I had a lovely experience in Tulsa of doing a story and having them ask me to do it *all* over again *right away*. So that was very nice. What I am trying to do is essentially deal with all of the folklore genres all over again, on a level they can enjoy.

SV: What's next? What kinds of projects are you working on now?

AS: Well, I'm working on several things actually. I'm finishing up a second "I Can Read" book of scary material called *Ghosts* which is very, very interesting material. I'm finishing a book of treasure tales, which are really an interesting form in American literature.

SV: What is a treasure tale?

AS: Treasure tales recount the experiences of people who are looking for treasure that has been hidden in some way. But most treasure tales—in at least American literature—follow a particular structure, and the treasure is not often found. So the emphasis is on the excitement of the hunt rather than on the actual recovery of a treasure. Anyway, this stuff is really interesting. I'm also doing an anthology of folk poetry.

SV: Any particular kind of poetry?

AS: Varieties of things. I'm going to follow the kind of patterning I did with *Unriddling*, which was to present varieties of the riddle. And there is a lot of intriguing material out there I am having fun with.

SV: As you are researching, is that how ideas are generated? One thing sort of connects with another?

AS: Sometimes that way. Sometimes—in reading something—it strikes me that an idea might be possible. I write myself a note and drop it in a little box on my work table, and then maybe once a month I empty the box and I look to see what I've got. Most of it I throw away. If something seems possible, I begin collecting material. I have folders on everything that vaguely interest me.

SV: Some things may dead end and others may prove productive?

AS: Oh, yeah. I have an interest in horses, for example. And I

have son who is a newly minted Ph.D., a political scientist. He was doing a lecture on the role of the horse in rulership of various kinds and so I was pleased that he turned to me to see what I had.

SV: There's a lot of humor in a lot of the books. Is that on purpose, or is that part of folklore?

AS: In part, that's me. Oh, of course, a lot of the stuff is very funny, and when dealing with hyperbole we are dealing with essentially an American form. If you look in the introduction to *Whoppers,* there is an interesting explanation of our interest in this form and how it really emerged. It exists throughout the world, but it emerged in a peculiarly American form, I think, during the frontier days. When people were confronted with so much, they simply had to make themselves bigger and stronger through their tales, to deal with it. But, the humor I use does, I think, reflect me. I'm not very—what's the word I'm looking for—I'm not socially forthcoming in many ways, but I do love things that are funny. So I have a great time when I'm dealing with something that's funny—much of this is ironic material.

SV: Do you find that kids pick up on this? Is that a favorite aspect of theirs also?

AS: Yep, yep, yep. Although, one of the things I've been doing is using mat*ē*rial that once was regarded as material for adults, and I've disc*ō*vered that children have gotten so sophisticated that it works. And the material itself is acceptable, whereas, maybe twenty or thirty years ago, it wouldn't have been. If you asked me for an example, I couldn't give you one. It's just a general impression I have of what I've been doing and what's been happening.

SV: Do you have any advice for teachers along this line? About adults working with kids?

AS: Well, in terms of working with the kinds of material that I use, I would certainly suggest that they look to *themselves* as a resource. They know a lot of folklore, as much as anybody else, if they stop and think about it. And they should go back to the generation that precedes them, their relatives and older friends. The kids, after all, are also authors of this stuff, and that's really something when you think about it. There's something remarkable about all these people who don't see themselves as especially talented as having created all this wonderful material. This, to me, is very exciting. I think it can be reinforcing for kids who are having problems—problems with self-confidence—to understand that folklore is something that unknown ordinary people have created as expressions of some of their innermost feelings. It's really very important. They need to know this.

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Recent Publications

1989 *I Saw You in the Bathtub and Other Folk Rhymes* (editor)
1988 *Gold and Silver, Silver and Gold: Tales of Hidden Treasure*
1987 *Telling Fortunes: Love Magic, Dream Signs, and Other Ways to Learn the Future*

10 *Author/Illustrators*

Mitsumasa Anno's Journey

Alice K. Swinger

Just as the silent horseback rider wanders wondering through European countryside in the *Journey* books, Mitsumasa Anno wonders about the world and all that is in it. His books, products of the wondering and wandering, invite readers to share in his discoveries. In a certain sense this style of creating continues a pattern established in Anno's childhood. He tells this story about himself.

"I used to play by laying a mirror on the floor and looking into it. The ceiling was, of course, reflected so I had the sensation of looking into a cellar below me. I enjoyed my game day after day, but after awhile it was no longer enough for me to just imagine in my own mind that there was a cellar. I wanted to share it with someone.

"I told my younger brother that from the outside our house may look small and shabby but I had heard from my father that in reality we had a gigantic cellar. I told him that it was the biggest secret, top secret in fact, and it was never to be disclosed to anyone. 'In that basement,' I said, 'there's a lot of money and there's enough rice that even if we tried all through our lives to consume it, we couldn't do it.'

"I told him that the toys we used to play with together, that though he might think they are gone, are stored very carefully in the basement. My brother was delighted to hear the story, he was ecstatic, so I lied more and more to him. My brother was therefore happy and so was I. I accumulated lies on top of lies to tell him.

"In reality that was not lying to him but was exactly what I wanted to believe myself."[1]

It is not surprising that a boy with a vivid and persistent imagination became a man who explores the spaces, both real and imagined, outside his childhood home. Born in historic Tsuwano, a village in a western prefecture in Japan, Anno's curiosity began early. What lay beyond the mountains that surround his hometown? What people lived in the cities and countries touched by the ocean that lapped at the shores on the other side of the mountains? Mr. Anno recalls again a childhood game which may explain some portion of his view of the world.

"I remember that my friend, Mura, and I used to look out of the window of our school. The two of us watched our friends playing in the school field with the other students. Naturally, we couldn't hear them but we tried to imagine what they might be saying to each other. One of us would guess what someone out there said and the other person must guess how the others responded. In this way we spent a great deal of time during recess, observing people and predicting what they were doing and saying. He is now the mayor of the town while I became an artist."

An artist who first earned his living as a teacher of mathematics, Mr. Anno's first trip to Europe resulted in *Anno's Journey*, which set the stage for journeys to follow. It is in this book that adult readers may find miniatures of art ("The Gleaners" and "The Angelus") that hung on the walls of their childhood homes, comic strip characters who delighted their school years, and people from classic literature. Youngsters will recognize Sesame Street characters, Pinocchio, Red Riding Hood, and the Pied Piper.

Anno's Britain and *Anno's Italy*, similar in style and theme to *Anno's Journey*, contain images familiar and unusual, expected and unexpected. People who have traveled in those countries see the sights they saw there. They also see jokes, unexpected characters, and topological impossibilities.

Although the *journey* theme occurs in many stories in literature around the world, Anno's journeys are different. The artist's perspective requires the reader to look down into vast spaces filled with people, activities, and objects from the center to the nooks and crannies, just as it is in reality. Even in this profusion, pictures are never cluttered; the masterful overall design and the limited detail on people ensure

[1] Quotations from Mitsumasa Anno in this article come from an interview with him conducted in Tokyo in August 1986.

that. The lone horseman provides a focal point as he rides through observing, and sometimes becoming part of, the action. How did Mr. Anno choose this *journey* format?

"I wanted to make a book with a lot of ideas packed in, with one thousand items in it. I didn't know how to start and I thought and thought, until I saw that there could be a path, and beside the path there would be a river. Where there is a river there must be a mill, and where there is a mill there must be people. People use the river and so I can easily understand how I can make a book with a thousand ideas in it. That, together with the memory of my friend Mura and I watching our companions during my childhood, gave me the form to follow."

The journey books are acclaimed all over the world, with children and adults hoping their country will be the focus of the next journey. (Anno thinks Spain may be next.) Beyond the games, tricks, jokes, and riddles which appeal to young and old, the books reflect a warm, deep universality. How is that achieved?

"There are differences in people, different styles of housing, social differences, different cultures all over the world. But perhaps, what lies at the bottom of the heart of each human being is the same, an inherent value. For example, parents caring for their children, young lovers yearning for each other, those basic emotions, those human values are the same all over.

"I was compelled to realize that when I went to a wedding in Germany. The formalities are completely different from the wedding ceremonies in Japan but when I saw the mother in tears as she was presenting her daughter it made me feel, 'Yes, human emotions are the same—the basic human values are the same.' I hope people understand that in what I do and what I write."

There is no doubt that Mitsumasa Anno's books have a universal appeal. His knowledge of art, architecture, history, popular and traditional culture enable him to synthesize ideas as well as particularize them, thus blurring distinctions of time and space. National borders lose their importance in his books. In *Anno's Flea Market*, for example, objects from cultures as diverse as the Middle East, Mexico, Europe, and Japan appear side by side. While Western readers may easily spot Popeye and Olive Oyl selling spinach, observers from other cultures will see images specific to their heritages. Everyone will recognize the intrepid horseman riding across a table of dolls.

Aside from the similarities among cultures, Anno has a way of leaping over the boundaries and seeing the world as a whole. Interested in natural phenomena, he began thinking about the fact that each day

is different for people; while people in Japan are eating breakfast, those in the United States are finishing their evening meal. While people in one country are enjoying summer, others are experiencing winter. While some people spend their days in peace, others are at war.

He had a growing desire to show that while people are seeing the sun rise at different times, it is the same sun; while they are perceiving life differently, they live lives on the same planet. The need to confirm and demonstrate this again led to the creation of *All in a Day*. To create this book, Anno invited artists from different countries to join him in the representation of the same time at different points around the world. Thus, Raymond Briggs from England, Ron Brooks of Australia, Gian Calvi from Brazil, Eric Carle from the United States, Zhu Chengliang from the People's Republic of China, Akiko Hayashi from Japan, and Nicolai Ye Popov of the Soviet Union created the pictures representing their countries. Leo and Diane Dillon, who have written and illustrated books with African settings, provided the artwork for Kenya. Mitsumasa Anno created the uninhabited island.

Each double-page spread of the book shows the time in a different place, and characteristic activities of people for time of day or night. Since some locations are in the southern hemisphere and some in the northern, seasons are different. Clothing, toys, foods, activities, and appearances all reflect the specific cultures of eight featured countries. A combined note from the illustrators tells of their hopes that when today's children grow up, the earth, our one planet in a huge universe, will be a place where everyone can always be happy and friendly. This book and Anno's work in Amnesty International underscore the concern for international understanding that is apparent in his books.

As evidenced by the book, *Anno's Medieval World*, Mitsumasa Anno is interested in European medieval thought. He explains that in Europe, there was a developing realization in the minds of people that they lived on a round rotating earth which revolved around the sun. This increasing awareness transformed their values from a prescience or nonscience to a scientific world view. It is the dawning awareness and growing conviction which interest Anno because it is unlike Japan, where the information was brought in from the Western world and accepted as fact. Anno believes that the change in the thinking there did not occur in the same way as it did in the West.

People and animals in Anno's medieval world first live and move about on a flat slab. While some of the activities demonstrate ordinary pursuits such as eating, playing, and working, other actions show observation of celestial bodies, sensitivity to changing seasons, listeners

attending to lecturers, workmen building boats and devices to enable people to see a farther horizon. As the book moves to its close the sphere is complete, set on an axis against a backdrop of the space of the universe.

It is not only Anno's awareness of beliefs and behaviors of others that informs his work. He has an ability to change and grow through his own experiences. He remembers a visit to Odense, Denmark, where he went to do some sketches in the Andersen museum. There he saw sketches done by Hans Christian Andersen. He recalls, "I found them to be so much at ease, so unpretentious and so unself-conscious. It is a problem in the modern time that we have to draw rather rigidly, so solidly and with such exact perspective. But for Andersen that wasn't necessary at all.

"In Odense there is a city hall with a church next to it and there is a small plaza in front of it. There I put my easel and sketched the city. The people stopped to watch my sketching. When I sensed their curiosity and their feeling, 'Oh, he can't even draw,' I had to take out another sheet of paper and begin this professionally done painting. I am ashamed of having done that but it seemed necessary at the time. At a time after that I hypnotized myself and said to myself that I was Hans Christian Andersen. I said I am not a professional artist so I can do anything when it comes to painting. That experience was a turning point in my life in the sense of pride, the sense of being an artist which has restricted me so much, bound me so much, was gone at the time. And since that time I have found pleasure in doing the work. If I had one word to comment on Hans Christian Andersen, it is he was an excellent artist."

A long list of prizes and honors has been given Anno for his books, indicating the critical approbation of institutions and organizations. With this recognition and the accompanying fame achieved, what remains important to him?

Anno thinks it is important to search for truth. When he is confronted by a question, he attempts to put aside previously formed opinions and start at zero, or from a clean slate, looking for truth, or the reality of the situation. This system, he reports, never fails to help him find an answer to the question. In addition to his search for truth, he is motivated by a desire to be free, to study, to learn, to find pleasure in living. The books for children are like the game he played as a child—he creates a world for the pleasure it brings him, and for those who look into the mirror with him.

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Recent Publications

1990 *Anno's Mask*
1989 *Anno's Aesop: A Book of Fables by Aesop and Mr. Fox*
1989 *Anno's Faces*
1988 *Anno's Peekaboo*
1988 *Anno's USA*
1988 *In Shadowland*
1988 *Upside-Downers*
1987 *Anno's Math Games*
1987 *Anno's Sundial*

11 *Author/Illustrators*

Arnold Lobel

David E. White

By winning the Caldecott Award for *Fables* in 1981, Arnold Lobel assured himself a permanent place in the field of children's literature. Although *Fables* is a memorable book, the Frog and Toad books are perhaps the most popular of Lobel's creations. In 1971 he received a Caldecott Honor award for *Frog and Toad Are Friends*. *Frog and Toad Together* was a 1973 Newbery Honor book.

Arnold Lobel died December 4, 1987, in Manhattan. During his twenty-five-year career he created over seventy books for children; they have been translated into many foreign languages. His many timeless books will continue to provide pleasure in the years to come.

Arnold Stark Lobel was born in Los Angeles, California, on May 22, 1933, the son of Joseph and Lucille Lobel. His parents were divorced when he was very young and he was raised in Schenectady, New York, by his grandparents who had a strong sense of domestic regime. He realized his interest in art at an early age. "I was not athletic. I was bookish and sort of isolated as a child. As I grew up, I guess I did a very smart thing. I sort of escaped into my own fantasy world. I read books, drew pictures, and stayed in my room. It wasn't the healthiest thing to do psychologically, but it certainly led to my eventual career."

After high school Lobel studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. He received a B.F.A. in 1955. The same year he married Anita Kempler, with whom he would later collaborate on four books: *How the Rooster Saved the Day* (1977), *A Treeful of Pigs* (1979), *On Market Street* (1982), and *The Rose in My Garden* (1984). They had two children: Adrianne and Adam. Initially Lobel had difficulty finding work. "From 1955 to

1960 I went to employment agencies and one after another they would say, 'There's no money in that. You can't do that.' In 1955 there really wasn't much being done in the children's book field. What opened it up was Sputnik. All of a sudden, we got dreadfully self-conscious. To compete against the Russians, we decided to pump more money into educational materials and somehow children's books began to blossom." Lobel received his first contract to illustrate a book in 1960 for *Red Tag Comes Back*, a story about a salmon. In 1961 he wrote and illustrated a book for children, *A Zoo for Mister Muster*. By 1965 he was earning what he called a "living wage."

When tackling various books Lobel often set a problem for himself. These problems, or "frameworks" as he called them, challenged him to try new ways of approaching his books. Frog and Toad were selected as characters for very specific reasons. "The reasons Frog and Toad were a frog and a toad were many and varied, and partly because my children kept pet toads for a while. We went to Vermont and they caught frogs and toads. I did the same thing as a child. I loved those creatures. They were the most beautiful things I had ever seen.

"But that wasn't the whole reason. I was looking for two male characters. The idea of two male chums is so traditional in literature. For a speech, I once made a list of these: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two guys from *Waiting for Godot*, Don Quixote and Sancho, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, etc. I wanted them to be alike, yet different. Although frogs and toads are both amphibians, they're very different. At that time it was important for me in my creative process to go inward and to start writing about things going on in myself. I had been doing children's books for about ten years and I had never done that before. I had always written about things that I thought children would like to read about. I had left something out—me. I wanted a mouthpiece for myself. I wanted a dialogue to go on between two characters who were essentially me talking to myself.

"I was certainly influenced by Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. That toad does have some resemblance to my toad except that that toad is completely psychotic. He's a real nut. My toad, a small adventurer like me, is just your normal everyday neurotic. He's all right. He's a little bit off the beam. All of those things came together at that time for me."

Owl at Home began with a different framework. Initially Lobel did not know what the story or the character would be. In describing the framework for this book, he said, "I'd created these Frog and Toad books where there were two characters with dialogue. Could I write a book with a single character?" He decided to have five chapters,

limited vocabulary, and a character all alone. With this framework upon which to build, he completed the story.

The framework for his book *Pigericks* was his love for Edward Lear. "I think his limericks and his drawings are the pinnacle of children's literature. I wanted to write some of my own based on what he had done, and I didn't want to use people because then everybody would have thought I was just making more Lear. So, I decided to use an animal. I think pigs are terrific animals. Using pigs for characters immediately pulled my limericks away from Lear. It was as simple as that. There was nothing profound about that decision."

The framework for *Whiskers and Rhymes* was Mother Goose. Lobel wanted to create a whole book of his own Mother Goose. In some cases he used rhymes from Mother Goose; sometimes he changed or switched them around. To cue readers to the fact that these were new rhymes that he had created, Lobel made all the characters cats. "I happen to be a great cat fancier. I got this inspiration on how to do this in a flash when I was sitting in my living room working and my cat walked by. I had written this whole book when I came upon this idea. You do something because it feels just right. It wouldn't have felt right to write that book and to have used people. As I'm creating a book I have to make choices. Making the characters cats seemed like a good choice."

One of his last books was *Arnold Lobel's Mother Goose*. "I love Mother Goose. The body of literature that is Mother Goose has very concentrated emotion: terror, fear, and every aspect of life. The rhymes are perfect examples of the literature that adults and children can appreciate at different levels. Recent editions of Mother Goose have been too limiting. I hope my book will be distinctive by the quality of its art work and the insightfulness and originality of my interpretation.

"I believe that children should be terrified—healthfully—an artistic terror, an aesthetic terror." This view greatly influenced some of Lobel's works and it might be surprising to those who also heard him use the term "tender" to describe some of his creations. Lobel carefully described his belief in artistic terror, his works affected by that notion, and background experiences influencing this view. "I think it is very important for everybody to have artistic terror. That is very rare in things that kids have. The stuff on television really isn't terrifying. It's just violent, nauseating, and shocking. In 'Shivers,' a Frog and Toad story, I show precisely how delicious it is to be in a comfortable safe place and yet be frightened. Agatha Christie made a whole career of using 'cozy fear.' Cozy fear is important for children. They can feel it

when they are sitting in the arms of their parents and being read a story or while sitting in a comfortable theater watching something on the screen that is scary. I guess that is all right and necessary. We adults certainly remember those moments from our childhoods. I remember radio. Radio was much scarier than television. I could choose to either listen to 'The Shadow' or to sleep that night. I had to make that kind of choice. I usually opted for 'The Shadow.' It satisfied some need at the time.

"I loved my work with Jack Prelutsky's two books: *Poems to Trouble Your Sleep* and *The Headless Horseman Rides Tonight*. I could not have written those very scary poems but I was able to use my memory of being scared out of my wits when I was a child to illustrate them. I was able to use all of my going to movies and being too terrified to walk up the aisle in the dark to go to the bathroom. I would sit there in absolute discomfort watching those movies every Saturday—Frankenstein, the Wolfman, and the Mummy.

"My drawings for the two books are based largely on what I remember from those images of those old movies. I knew the books had to be done in black-and-white because I wanted to get strong black-and-white like those movies had. I was forced into using pen-and-ink crosshatching which I had never been able to master before. In this case I was forced to use it. I did and I enjoyed it.

"I think I learned more about illustrating children's books from movies than from any other art form: the selection of images, the narrative, and the way of showing things. I learned a lot from Hitchcock. He has been one of my mentors in terms of telling a story that is entertaining and yet has a whole other side. I try to do what he does in my picture books. There is a surface that has an underneath."

Although Lobel talked of the importance of cozy fear, he also identified comedy as a crucial element in children's books. "Most children's books are comedic in nature. Most comedy, whether it is for adults or for children, comes not from the pleasure of life but out of the pain of life, out of the humiliation of life. Think of the scene of Charlie Chaplin's pants falling down. That is a humiliating experience, but we laugh at it. If your pants fell down on 5th Avenue tomorrow morning, you would not think it was so funny *then*. You might laugh at it *later*. Nests of bees fall on people's heads, and people fall in water. Things go wrong. In children's books that negative element generally has to end up positive. That's the tradition."

Lobel's approach to his illustrations changed over the years. Initially he used tracing paper to make a rough sketch and clarify it, putting details on this second sheet. He might use several sheets to add, delete,

or clarify a picture. By turning the tracing paper around he could get a mirror image. He felt the process of making the dummy of a book was more exciting than the later finished art work.

In his last books he moved to a different process because he often felt he killed the freshness of his sketches when trying to redo them for finished art. "What I do now very often is to take the sketch and use it as an underpainting for the finished art. I keep what I like and maybe clean up some of the details. In this way I have the quality of a finished piece of art but I also have the freshness of a sketch. I did that for *Fables* which was written in twenty days without much rewriting. The art work didn't take much longer. That I call a supernatural event. It meant that the book came out a year earlier. I used the same approach for *Mother Goose*."

Lobel prized his dissatisfaction with his work. "I don't think my work would have grown an inch if I had not always been dissatisfied and filled with self-doubt. I feel my work is very flat. It's always been on the surface of the page. It would be wonderful to do a book which really deals with the way perspective is—furniture sitting on floors, lights, etc. Depth and form are difficult because I have no depth perception. I don't have bifocal vision. The image is totally suppressed on one of my eyes."

Although Lobel created more than seventy books for children during his career, his self-doubt was evident even at the end. "I never know if anything I've ever done is good or bad. My lack of self-consciousness again shows through. I've been with it so long. After rubbing your nose in it for so long, you can't see it anymore. You think it is wonderful. That's why it is sometimes good to have someone read it because you can watch their reaction and get feedback. I appreciate editors' feedback. At first I usually don't say anything. I drink in all their comments and go home for a long think. Generally it turns out that I agree, but if I don't, I'll say it. I'll fight for what I think is right."

Arnold Lobel chose not to do a lot of direct appearances in front of children because he felt uncomfortable doing them. He knew that children were interested in him and his creative process. In order to share with them how he made books, he revealed it in one of his books. The framework of *Pigericks* was Lear; however, there was a second very important component. "I wanted to show children the whole process of how I make books. For this book I made a prologue and an epilogue where I, pictured as a pig, am an artist sitting at a drawing table. I am creating this book which is *Pigericks* and at the end I am resting from this brainstorm of creativity. It is definitely me

and it emphasizes the book as a creative act rather than just an arbitrary series of little amusing verses."

The concluding verse of *Pigericks* is an appropriate ending for this tribute to Arnold Lobel and his work:

> There was an old pig with a pen
> Who had finished his work once again.
> Then he quietly sat
> With his comfortable cat . . .
> While he rested his brushes and pen.

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12 *Author/Illustrators*

Chris Van Allsburg in Three Dimensions

Barbara Kiefer

Asked about Chris Van Allsburg's choice of black-and-white illustrations for the book *Jumanji*, an eight-year-old commented, "It's harder when it's in black-and-white. It takes more time and you can't just skip through the book. . . . You like to take time." Like his books, Chris Van Allsburg is a man you like to take time getting to know. Awarded Caldecott medals for two of his eight books, Van Allsburg is as multidimensional as the sculptures which launched his artistic career—there is a depth to the man, his work, and his art which delights and intrigues adults and children alike.

Bearded, bespectacled, and in his mid-thirties, Van Allsburg is softspoken and intense with a sharp, sometimes wry, sense of humor, especially when it comes to himself. His interest in art began early but he admits that during his public school years peer pressure persuaded him toward more traditionally male pursuits. His need to create art did not reawaken until his freshman year at the University of Michigan when he took a course in figure drawing. During the five years it took to get his liberal arts degree he concentrated on sculpture courses rather than two-dimensional art such as drawing and painting. He reports, "When I studied three-dimensional art it reminded me so much of building models when I was a little kid. I thought it was great that I was going to get a college degree for doing the same thing I did when I was six years old."[1]

[1] Quotes come from a conversation with and comments by Mr. Van Allsburg during "The Educated Eye: Appreciating Art in Children's Books," a preconference sponsored by The Association for Library Service to Children at the Annual Conference of The American Library Association in New York, June 1986, and subsequent telephone conversations.

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A second reason for concentrating on sculpture, he confesses, was that his fellow art students had been taking drawing classes for many more years, and he admits to feeling intimidated by his own lack of practice. "I felt kind of out-classed in a way because drawing is actually a skill that requires development. It's like learning to play the piano and I hadn't developed that skill." In his first three-dimensional design course, he explains, "I found that was the course I really liked because I just built things and the skill level doesn't reveal itself when you build things. I really liked making three-dimensional objects because illusion is involved, but the illusion of space is not an issue in sculpture. You don't have to know about light because reality takes care of that."

Freedom from the demands of the technical elements of two-dimensional design such as perspective, value, and space seems to have allowed Chris to explore ideas rather than getting hung up on technique and to play with mental illusions rather than physical ones. His sculptures, with provocative titles like "The Invisible Men Bookends," and "Ball Coming to a Skidding Stop on a Checkered Carpet," give the viewer a sense of having interrupted a life lived in some offbeat and slightly surreal world and imply some interesting story in progress.

His penchant for telling stories with his sculpture eventually led to his storytelling in picture books. Following graduation from the University of Michigan, Chris and his wife Lisa moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where Chris began a master's degree program at Rhode Island School of Design. In Rhode Island he began to establish his reputation as a sculptor and also to develop his drawing abilities. "I set up a little studio and I made sculpture all the time. The studio was a little far from my home so I would go in in the morning and come back at dinner. Being such a long way from the studio, I started drawing at night as a hobby. I considered sculpture my vocation and my hobby was drawing."

In the late 1970s Lisa, who at the time was teaching third grade, produced a nonprofit television show in Providence. She invited illustrator David Macaulay, who had appeared on her show, home for dinner one night. Macaulay echoed Lisa's feelings that Chris's work had a strong narrative potential and urged him to show his drawings to editors. From that happy event have come eight books, numerous awards—and a warm friendship. Today Chris divides his time between writing and illustrating books, executing drawings, and teaching at The Rhode Island School of Design.

While he is reluctant to characterize his approach to creating picture books because he doesn't feel he's been at it that long, he reports that

he begins with writing and that "the writing impulse grows out of a vague feeling about time and place," one that seems to combine a visual premise with a psychological one. It is difficult, however, for him to say at what point the story congeals with the visual premise. "I think they happen almost at the same time," he explains. "My feeling is that if a writer sits down to write or a painter sits down to paint, if they're simply deeply involved with the *process* it is inevitable that they'll reveal something about their personality or something they feel strong about."

This approach to writing, however, means being willing to take risks as *process* reveals ideas and evolves into story, and it is not always a smooth transition. His first book, *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, in which a boy stumbles into the garden of a retired magician and into a world that is not quite what it seems to be, began with a fascination for the images represented in topiary gardens. But he soon found that this single image was not enough to carry a whole story. At first, he reports, he was guided by his role as a picture maker, feeling "that in order for a drawing to be interesting it had to have content and that it was the content itself that was being described" in a story. He learned, however, "that you can't set out with that simple kind of visual goal. I found out the drawings truly have to serve the text" in a picture book. Therefore, it was the premise of "trying to compare illusion with real magic (what's just stage magic and when is it the real thing)" which eventually allowed the illustrations to evolve.

In *Jumanji*, his first Caldecott Medal winner, two idle children discover a board game which has unusual consequences. When a player lands on a square that says, "lion attack, move back two spaces," for example, a lion actually appears on the top of the piano. With this book, he explains, his inspiration was a "recollection of vague disappointment in playing board games as a child. Even when I owned Park Place with three hotels, I never felt truly rich." His story evolved from the visual premise of "the predictably interesting thing that happens with bizarre juxtapositions. It's impossible to draw a picture of a bunch of monkeys in somebody's kitchen and not have the drawing have some power."

In *Ben's Dream* he began with the "probably neurological" premise of two people having the same dream who then see each other in the dream. This idea combined with the visual premise of taking all the great landmarks of the world and sinking them under forty feet of water. As the dream progresses, the child, who has fallen asleep studying for a geography test one rainy afternoon, floats past the Parthenon, the Statue of Liberty, and other famous landmarks. Van

Allsburg feels that this book illustrates his belief that the picture should be able to stand on its own without the text, "that literally the book could fall apart and the picture would be shown somewhere else and if somebody found the picture they would still be interested."

This philosophy found its purest outlet in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, a book with fourteen unrelated drawings purported to be the works of an illustrator who disappeared many years ago leaving only these fourteen samples of his work. Van Allsburg muses that *Mysteries* is basically a thematic apperception test for children and reports that he has close to seven hundred stories sent by children who have responded to the drawings in their own personal ways.

Both *The Wreck of the Zephyr* and *The Polar Express* seem to have grown out of his attempts to make sense of single visual images similar to the ones he set up in *Harris Burdick*. *The Wreck of the Zephyr* tells of a boy who, determined to be the best sailor in the world, takes on more than he can handle and ends up in a world where boats sail on the wind rather than on the sea. This book, Van Allsburg's first in color, began simply with the image of a boat aloft above water, what he refers to as his "Winslow Homer meets Walt Disney" idea. *The Polar Express* was also a case of having a visual image ("a train standing still in the middle of winter and waiting for someone") and trying to make sense of it.

In *The Stranger*, Van Allsburg set himself the task of "successfully creating a sense of time and place" and of portraying the emotions of the protagonist visually rather than with words. The book, he reports, is actually a riddle. There are twelve clues to the identity of the stranger who arrives at a farm and seems to hold time still.

In his latest book, *The Z Was Zapped*, Chris set himself a new challenge. Prior to this book, he reports, he had been drawing things he had to imagine. In this book, the premise was a play in which things happen to letters. He therefore set up a stage and actually constructed as much of each scene as possible so that he could draw from life rather than from his imagination.

Van Allsburg's books, the final products that we hold between our hands and enjoy at so many levels, are not simply the result of a struggle to express visual or psychological premises in some coherent whole. These finished books involve a variety of more technical efforts. Beneath the surface of Van Allsburg's beautiful books lie his thorough knowledge of design, technique, and book production as well as a scholarly understanding of art history. He estimates that each book takes approximately four months to complete when the time is compressed. Once the story is fairly coherent he begins the drawings.

While he used to begin on a fairly large scale and use overlay (tracing paper) to move things around, he now does very small thumbnail sketches. "Sometimes I get a very good idea for some part of the text and I might do two or three thumbnail sketches; other times I might do ten or twelve just trying to figure out the best place to look at it." Once the entire book is visually presented in these small sketches, he moves to a much larger scale, about twice the size of the finished book. The drawings for *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* were about two and one-half feet tall, three times as large as the book.

In executing the art work for the book, his background in three-dimensional forms seems to influence his preoccupation with perspective and value (the interplay of light and dark) that makes his style so unique. His knowledge of the rules of perspective allows him to provide a variety of views of a scene in the same way that we would walk around a piece of sculpture. Van Allsburg explains that perspective helps make the picture interesting. In *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, for example, he experimented with "the abrupt symmetry of single-point perspective" so that the statuary seems to call the boy back as he looks down a long tunnel into Gasazi's garden. This use of perspective heightens the drama in the story as does the variation in viewpoints used in *Jumanji*. "The point of view that I choose, I choose for two reasons," he explains, "creating drama for that picture but also creating variety in it."

His knowledge of the rules of perspective also makes it possible to draw the fantastic views of the monuments in *Ben's Dream*. "You'd never find a picture of Big Ben from that vantage and it would be positively prohibitive to rent an airplane to go up and take a picture. It takes perspective to do that."

A second feature of the style that fascinates readers is his ability to use tones of dark and light in such a way that forms seem to rise up off the page at the same time the viewer feels called into the scene. Chris is constantly striving to get more value range. He explains, "Light is most provocative when it's very unique. I tell this to my students all the time. If you really want something to appear as though it's brilliantly lit only light the edge of it. Don't stick the light in front because in order to have light look bright it has to be surrounded by dark." That he succeeds in bringing three-dimensional qualities to two-dimensional forms is evidenced in children's comments that *Jumanji* looks "like it's clay" or that in *The Wreck of the Zephyr* "Van Allsburg really uses the sunlight," and "the wave looks like a stone wall because it's three-dimensional."

Once the art work and story line for Chris's books are complete

they go to the publisher where technical choices inherent in book publishing have to be made. Here he usually sits down with the Houghton Mifflin designer to choose type face, paper stock, endpaper colors, and cover art. They also must consider the mechanical processes involved in printing. For the pages of the book, for example, he prefers an uncoated vellum stock because this is like the paper used for the original art. This gives the viewer a sense of continuity in books like *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* or *Jumanji*. However, uncoated stock gives a very poor reproduction of lower values. "If you try to put low value range colors on uncoated stock they just die," Chris explains.

So he has had to compromise and choose a coated (shiny) paper for the finished book when color is involved. His penchant for very dark values has also caused other headaches during the printing process. In *The Polar Express* he attempted to achieve the qualities of the light at night by mixing color complements (reds with greens, oranges with blues) to bring out "that ambiguous flavor of colors in low light." It turned out "to be almost impossible to reproduce" through mechanical printing processes, a problem made more difficult by the double-page spreads. The end results, he reports, were quite different from the originals in color but retained the value range of the originals. The finished products, while not a mirror of the original art, are still works of art in their own right.

Of the entire process (writing, drawing, and printing), one might think that the creation of the art work would be his favorite. He reports a certain disappointment, however, when the time comes to work on the illustrations for each book perhaps because it is impossible to reproduce the images that he has seen so clearly in his mind during the writing process.

Perhaps as an antidote to this letdown he sets himself personal challenges in each book, choosing a new medium or new approach to drawing. This willingness to take risks with the unfamiliar means that what he refers to as his mistakes are there for the whole world to see—"It's like writing in your diary and having it seen by a lot of people." He explains, looking back at *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, "About three or four months after I was done with the book, I looked at it and I'd get depressed because I thought I could do so much better. After I finished *Gasazi*, I actually went back and started making sculpture. My idea was that this little folly of mine would at least provide me with the opportunity to buy lots of remainder copies to have as Christmas books for friends for eternity, but it didn't work out that way."

In spite of the fact that he knows that experimenting means his

earliest efforts are going to be published, he continues to be willing to deal with this "growing process" in public and with the problems and pleasures that arise as he learns more and more about two-dimensional art.

His early efforts were with black-and-white media. This, he feels, may have been partially a result of his experience with sculpture: "As a sculptor, whenever I imagined something, it was going to be in wood and it wasn't really necessary to imagine it in color." He chose carbon pencil rather than graphite pencil for *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* because "I like to draw very dark and with graphite it gets very silvery and it's hard to tell exactly what you're doing." He also likes the very thin lead which allows him to get clean edges. With *Jumanji* he switched to Conte pencil, a bit more refined than carbon pencil and a medium he feels allowed him "to control the tonal range a bit better." In this book he also made use of the dust produced when the pencil was sharpened with sandpaper. "I used cotton balls and just roughed out the drawing with the value (dark areas) because it occurred to me to use quicker, bolder means to work out the drawing very roughly with the dust." This technique, of course, requires meticulous care to keep the dust from smudging.

For *Ben's Dream* he chose pen and ink, which forced him to create the range of dark and light with lines much the way an engraver does. Thus the drawings "took longer than any art I've done for a book so far because it takes so long to construct all the value with flat lines."

Van Allsburg turned to color for the first time with *The Wreck of the Zephyr* in which he used Rembrandt pastels. He reports that he still likes the book but "I see now that I wasn't using pastels the way they really are meant to be used, I used pastel like paint and it's really a drawing medium." He returned to black-and-white with *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, and more recently in *The Z Was Zapped*, choosing charcoal and black pastel and charcoal pencils, respectively, because he was trying to get a greater value range. *The Polar Express* was done in oil pastels, which combine the characteristics of pastel with the brilliance of crayons and *The Stranger* in Caran D'Ache, art crayons soluble either in water or in turpentine.

Van Allsburg's use of media of this type may represent an increasing willingness to move into oil painting. He reports: "I feel pretty comfortable with continuous tone black-and-white. With the drawings in *Harris Burdick* I found a medium that I really like, but I don't feel like I've even scratched the surface with color or even found a medium I'm comfortable with. Because I've never studied painting I'm reluctant

to get involved with it, but I know that sooner or later I will because you have to face it, oil paint is sort of the king of media."

His own awareness of the historical importance of oil paintings reflects another side of Van Allsburg: a man thoroughly grounded in art history. Rather than consciously choosing to work in the style of one artist or another, however, he seems to share a sense of design and composition with artists from many time periods, from the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Jan Vermeer, eighteenth-century Italian etcher Giovanni Battista Piranesi, nineteenth-century German artist Max Klinger to the French and American landscape painters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

He seems to feel a kinship with Georges Seurat, neo-Impressionist, as well as twentieth-century American landscape artist Grant Wood for the way in which they "placed objects within a frame and established an artificial order." He explains of Seurat's work, "If he's going to draw nature, he wanted everything to be in the right place, to be ordered. Even if I was going to draw a room that a tornado would run through, it would probably still be an orderly pile of trash." The similarities between some of the landscapes in *The Stranger* to Grant Wood's work owe more to this shared sense of order and interest in qualities of light than to a conscious recreation of a particular style.

Van Allsburg also shares with these artists the need to work out problems and theories of visual representation. He mentions that while Piranesi's depiction of space may have influenced his mental image of the movement of the train through the wild spaces it passed through in *The Polar Express*, he had also fallen under the spell of nineteenth-century German artist Caspar David Friedrich before he did the book. What Friedrich did with the human figure, placing very small figures in vast spaces, Chris wanted to do with the train. In addition, it was Friedrich's use of "complementary color mixing to try to hold the colors in check" that influenced him to try this technique in *The Polar Express*.

He also seems to share with these artists a willingness to grow through risk-taking as he tries to define the nature of art, and he exhibits an artistic sense of angst when his efforts don't match up to expectations. One of the things that disappoints him in his work, he reports, "is I'm often too involved with the way things look. Even though I make up the realities on the page, I still seem to be too committed to a kind of conventional depiction of reality, especially when I deal with portraiture. It seems difficult for me to get away from the models that I'm using because I like to get so involved with the faces that I'm drawing that sometimes I deprive myself of an

opportunity to create a stronger feeling and flavor of the place in the book."

This tendency to self-examination as well as his work in both two- and three-dimensional art forms have led to strong feelings about what is important in an artist's work: "My own feelings about illustration, in fact not simply illustration but art, is that technical virtuosity is not a particularly important part of making good art. It's a sense that when you look at a piece that the artist was emotionally involved in what he was doing and as a consequence *you* become emotionally involved. I think technical virtuosity in the absence of that emotion is simply decoration. I think some people might draw the conclusion that because I'm involved in technique I really treasure that, but what I treasure most in illustration is a sense of honesty and character."

At present, Chris shares his home with his wife Lisa and a Siamese cat Cecil. Lisa, no longer a teacher, commutes to Boston to work in the radio and television field. Cecil, who at age twelve no longer hangs from door frames by his front paws, is still Chris's good companion. The dog, who appeared in *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* and every book since, is simply evidence of Van Allsburg's sense of playfulness, one of those visual premises that first appeared in three-dimensional form. Chris compares the dog to Alfred Hitchcock, "someone who puts in a cameo appearance so people will be compelled to buy all my books simply for the fun of finding the dog."

While he has not done any sculpture in several years (aside from designing his late 1930s kitchen which he approached like a piece of sculpture) he expects to return to it someday, just as someday he will try oil painting. For these somedays, he has toyed with the idea of "using trompe l'oeil to try to get things to float off the page and maybe have them go someplace else in the book." He reports that he is so filled with ideas that "the only problem I have is that sometimes I'm paralyzed because I don't know which idea I should do." For this reason he feels his time is best spent writing for his readers rather than speaking *to* them through letters or speaking engagements: "I don't think it's a valuable contribution of mine to go out and talk about my work, so I just stay in my studio and do it."

We are most fortunate that he has made this choice. Van Allsburg says of his art, "When you scratch the surface of a discipline you find out there is another surface below it that you can scratch." Van Allsburg too has the kind of depth that begins to be revealed as we look at his art and books and listen to his ideas and feelings. When we scratch the surface of Chris Van Allsburg we find a man to treasure for his

honesty and character and for the insights he gives us as writers, artists, and teachers into the creative process, truly a three-dimensional man.

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